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LETTERS

Letters

CHRISTOPH NIEMANN

WRONG ABOUT HILLARY

Ithaca, NY

■ In response to Katha Pollitt's "HRC: Can't Get No Respect" ["Subject to Debate," Nov. 20]: Sorry, Katha. Feminism today is much more complicated than you let it be. And you haven't done your homework on Hillary—she says yes to cluster bombs, yes to Israel's bombing of Lebanon, yes to curtailing abortion, yes to a constitutional amendment against flag-burning, no to gay marriage. She has one of the ten most conservative voting records in the Senate. You need to do your research before you claim Hillary is a good thing for any of us. You rant against Code Pink as though they were the same as the right wing in this country. Shame. And let us take the past forty years of feminisms, as you mention, and realize that your old-fashioned liberal feminism, which claims that a female President will give women power *like* men, is deeply flawed. Most feminists across the globe know better than this.

Just ask the women in Sweden or Liberia or Chile or Germany, for that matter—many with women presidents today. If you follow your own claims, I guess you support Condi Rice as a gain for women and for the world more generally. And she clearly is not that for women here or in Afghanistan or in Iraq.

Last, if you quote me, could you quote the entire sentence? I have said and written elsewhere, "I think Hillary is a dangerous remedy to the present antidemocratic drift in this country, not because she is a female but because her being female allows a cover for her masculinist militarism." You really have this wrong, Katha. You allow the right wing to push you into a corner, and you end up authorizing Hillary the decoy, not a viable progressive or feminist candidate. It would be great if your column precipitates a *Nation* dialogue on the complexities of feminisms for this war-torn moment we all face. ZILLAH EISENSTEIN

New York City

■ Katha Pollitt's "HRC: Can't Get No Respect" is a brilliant, dead-on summation of the unique challenges faced by Hillary Rodham Clinton, often from the most unexpected camps. Indeed, it seems as though the level of scrutiny she faces in her political career has only increased to include the very feminist forces you would expect to be behind her every step of the way. I guess she needs to bake cookies and stand by her man as the first steps in her presidential platform, if we're to take her seriously at all. As for me, I'll stick with the bitter, ambitious career woman all the way.

MATT LEWIS

POLLITT REPLIES

New York City

■ My column was a satirical riposte to the sexist insults and gender stereotyping heaped on Senator Clinton, not a serious commitment to vote for her. As I wrote, I would prefer a more left-wing candidate. I just don't like to see a woman knocked, mocked and insulted for being a woman, or held to higher standards than men. I have trouble with Code Pink's focusing on Hillary Clinton when blame for the Iraq War and militarism in general is so widely shared, even among Democrats—despite the title of Eisenstein's essay, the war in Iraq is not "Hillary's War." Unlike Code Pink, I don't expect women to be better than men, and I don't think peace is a women's issue. It's everybody's issue.

Eisenstein is the one who needs to do her research. Small points: Clinton voted *against* a constitutional amendment to ban flag-burning (unfortunately, she supported an anti-flag-burning bill). On gay marriage, she has said she isn't for it, but she wasn't in office to vote on DOMA (1996). She voted no on the federal marriage amendment in 2004 and no on a June resolution that prohibited states from recognizing gay marriage. Big points: She has never—repeat never—voted to "curtail abortion." She has a 100 percent approval rating from NARAL, Planned Parenthood and the National Family Planning and Reproductive Health Association. (If anything, her actions are more prochoice than her rhetoric: This fall, despite her own past verbal support for parental notification, she campaigned against the California referendum requiring it.) Finally, Hillary Clinton most definitely does not have "one of the ten most conservative voting records in the Senate." According to *National Journal*, which ranks senators numerically, that honor belongs to Orrin Hatch. Clinton is actually the twentieth most liberal Senator (Barack Obama, by the way, is sixteenth, not so different).

I don't consider myself a "liberal feminist"—one who believes formal equality is enough. I don't see how anyone could read my columns and put me in that camp. I would never vote for Condoleezza Rice or Germany's Angela Merkel (which doesn't mean I'm not pleased to see American and German men having to deal with a powerful woman—a new experience for too many of them). However, I wonder how Eisenstein knows what "most feminists across the globe" think. That's a lot of people! Surely among them are the women of Liberia and Chile, who worked hard to win the top jobs for Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf and Michelle Bachelet, and the women of Sweden, who have won through the electoral process an array of family and workplace benefits, and a level of gender equality, that American women can hardly imagine. I would have thought Eisenstein would applaud these partial but real victories for peace, human rights, women's rights, the rule of law and social progress. Apparently, she would prefer to "bird dog" them all.

KATHA POLLITT

IMMIGRANTS: LETTERS ON LETTERS

Franklin Twp., NJ

■ So much for compassionate liberalism ["Letters," Nov. 13]. Half-truths ("downward pressure on wages"), dubious assumptions ("but for the pool of...immigrants these businesses would have to pay a fair wage"), distortions ("the theft of my Social Security number"), exaggerations ("worsening the lot of most working Americans and imposing additional tax burdens on everyone"), hysteria ("we are being Latinized") and name-calling ("ivory tower leftists"). Pretty sad. It is possible to make a rational case, supported by some research, for limiting certain kinds of immigration, legal and otherwise, but apparently many liberals are as incapable of rationality as Lou Dobbs, a classic populist xenophobe if I've ever seen one.

It is true, as letter-writer Les Reed says, that it "is a long-established capitalist maneuver to pit groups of workers against one another to hold wages down and increase corporate profits." But taking a stance against immigrants deepens the division within the working class, just what many employers like to see. Pleading that it's only the illegal ones you're opposed to is a cop-out—it's still divisive. The alternative is to start to level the playing field and begin unifying the working class by improving the conditions of immigrant workers (via unionization, for example) and defending the human rights of all workers, including the illegal. Both pragmatic concerns and compassion require nothing less. MARTIN OPPENHEIMER

Inglewood, Calif.

■ I was filled with dismay and very saddened to read the responses by so-called progressives to your charge of nativism and your article on the xenophobe Lou Dobbs. I was brought to this country from Mexico "illegally" by my parents at the age of 2. My family and I obtained our legal residence in the 1980s, and I became a US citizen in 2000. I know firsthand about racism and fearmongering. My father, now a US citizen, worked for many years with a fake Social Security card. All taxes that applied to any US worker were deducted from his pay. He never applied for or took advantage of the government assistance programs, nor did my mother,

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EDITORIALS

Exorcising DeLay's Ghosts

Last January Representative Nancy Pelosi, Senator Harry Reid and other Democratic legislators unveiled a package grandly titled the Honest Leadership and Open Government Act. The bill—inspired by the Tom DeLay/Jack Abramoff scandals—would ban lobbyists from providing gifts and travel to Representatives, tighten rules on former legislators who become lobbyists, prohibit lawmakers from flying on corporate jets for official travel (though not for campaign trips) and compel wider disclosure of lobbying activities. It would also open House-Senate conferences to the public, improve aspects of government contracting and reform earmarking, the process by which lawmakers slip pet projects into spending measures. The bill, of course, was not embraced by House Republican leaders, who failed to make good on their promise to enact reform legislation.

Now Pelosi will have her chance. She has vowed to pass a new version of the bill as soon as she becomes House Speaker in January. She has the power to implement some reforms by revising House rules with a majority vote. (In the Senate, a two-thirds vote is needed to rewrite the rules.) With exit polls showing that voters cared a great deal about Congressional corruption, Pelosi and the Democratic leadership of the Senate have an opportunity—yes, even a mandate—to reform a Congress tainted by scandals on both sides of the aisle. And that is why Pelosi should reach beyond her own bill. (Pelosi's clean-up-Congress campaign took a hit when she backed Jack Murtha for majority leader; Murtha has been accused of ethical lapses including steering military contracts to firms represented by his brother and a former aide.)

The legislation Pelosi and Reid have pushed calls for the creation of an Office of Public Integrity to monitor lobbyists' filings. But this new entity would not review the conduct of legislators. That's a problem. The ethics committees of the House and Senate have long been bogged down by partisan wrangling and unable to engage in the necessary self-policing. And the House Ethics Committee no longer accepts complaints filed by outside groups, as it once did. (The Senate does accept such complaints—then doesn't act on them.) Asking lawmakers to investigate fellow party members in this politically divided era is expecting too much. Congress needs an independent investigator, as proposed by Representative Martin Meehan, a Democrat, and Representative Chris Shays, a Republican. Pelosi should include such a reform in her bill. Rules applying to lobbyists ought to be tightened. But lobbyists are only junior partners in Washington's institutional corruption; the senior partners are the legislators.

The reforms Pelosi and Reid are advocating fall into the good-first-steps category. Preventing lobbyists from plying legislators and staffers with meals and tickets to sports events is worthwhile—as is slowing down that ever-spinning revolving door between Capitol Hill offices and K Street suites. But let's be real: The mother's milk of Washington politics is not a lunchtime martini. What truly matters are the envelopes stuffed with thousands of dollars in campaign contributions. And there's nothing in the proposed legislation or rules changes that speaks to that.

Changing rules governing how lobbyists interact with legislators would be a notable first accomplishment for the Democrats. But the seriousness of that endeavor will be judged by what they do about the fundamental flaw in the system: the dependence of politicians on special-interest cash. Pelosi has supported public financing for Congressional campaigns. She will not be able to enact such a major reform on Day One. But as she implements initial reforms, she can declare they are merely preliminary moves and that much larger—and more significant—reform lies ahead.

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COMMENT

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A Complicated Blessing

Springfield, Missouri

"You can feel the surge!" exclaimed Republican Senator Jim Talent, his nerdy visage beaming from behind a makeshift podium in an airless, jam-packed conference room at the back of Springfield's old Lamplighter Inn. Late in the afternoon before election day, more than 100 volunteers had temporarily abandoned their posts at phone banks and in neighborhoods across Missouri's most conservative city, proud home to the Pentecostal Assemblies of God and five Christian colleges, to cheer their man—and their campaign. "If we can finish and execute this plan in the next twenty-seven hours," Talent told them, "I'm convinced you're going to re-elect yourselves a United States Senator."

The troops—an all-white mix of mostly conservative Christian senior citizens and students, including a gaggle of fraternity brothers shipped in from Brigham Young University for the final push—let out a rafter-shaking roar. Like thousands of Christian-right activists across the country, they'd looked past the scandals in Washington and Colorado and heeded the call, knocking on 45,000 Springfield doors (according to Talent's campaign) and placing 80,000 calls to registered Republicans and independents. Sure, they'd gotten some rude receptions here and there. "I am still shocked by the things some folks said to my face," said Steve Helms, who'd been knocking on doors since December in his campaign for the Statehouse. But, he said, "it's lined up right."

Missouri did look like this year's ideal setting for a last-minute Karl Rove–style surge to victory. All the ingredients of a massive turnout were in place—starting with a devout, scandal-free candidate with strong Christian-right credentials and a bottomless ad budget to help make Talent's opponent, Democratic state auditor Claire McCaskill, look like Hillary Clinton's (even more) evil twin. The essential Rovean plot twist was also in play: a "moral values" ballot issue that would enshrine the right to federally approved stem-cell research and therapies in the state Constitution.

But rather than serving as this year's Republican savior, Missouri ended up exemplifying why the GOP lost the midterms—and why the religious right's political alliances are increasingly, startlingly, up for grabs. Like their evangelical counterparts almost everywhere else, Missouri's religious right voted in surprisingly healthy, near-2004 numbers. But moderate and independent Missourians did not come along for the ride—partly because the stem-cell wedge proved to be anything but magic. Like the infamous Terri Schiavo intervention by Congress, opposition to stem-cell research is an extreme extension of the "pro-life" position—an extension too far, in the view of many Christian voters. As former Senator John Danforth wrote in spring 2005, "It is not evident to many of us that cells in a petri dish are equivalent to identifiable people suffering from terrible diseases." Danforth's blast spread through Missouri faster than kudzu. So did his warning that the religious right had become a dangerously divisive force.

As if bent on proving Danforth's point, stem-cell opponents waged an ugly campaign that ended up alienating many moderate and conservative Missourians. "God hates you," Alan Keyes

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reportedly informed stem-cell-research backers at a rally of 700 Springfield Christians in late September. If that wasn't enough, along came Rush Limbaugh in October. Stem-cell-research supporters had used some of their $30 million campaign budget to unleash a moral weapon of their own: actor Michael J. Fox, quaking from the effects of Parkinson's disease, in an emotional TV ad urging Missourians to vote for McCaskill and research. When Limbaugh mocked Fox and claimed he had exaggerated the effects of his disease to pull on voters' heartstrings, the radio rabble-rouser set off a backlash that stemmed the anti–stem cell tide and made voters wonder where the real morality lay. "To me, the stem-cell thing is just silly," Springfield's Tom Rollings told me on election night, holding the hands of his wife, Donna, and their toddler son after voting at Pleasant View school. A committed Christian, Rollings said he and his spouse "usually vote Republican, but not this time." To them, a far less publicized ballot initiative, one ignored by the Christian right, was the more legitimate "values" vote. "People's wages—*that* is a moral issue," Rollings said. "Especially when you're trying to feed your family."

Most Missourians agreed, as the state's initiative to raise the minimum wage to $6.50 an hour passed with more than 75 percent of the vote. Combined with the failure of the stem-cell wedge, it was a sign that evangelicals in Missouri, like those across the country, are eager for a more expansive version of what Christian politics means—beyond the old standbys of "life," "activist judges" and the "homosexual threat." That narrowness troubles even leading Christian conservatives like former George W. Bush adviser Marvin Olasky, now editor of the evangelical *World* magazine. In a scathing postelection editorial, Olasky skewered Republicans for abandoning compassionate conservatism, ignoring poverty and being "the party of corporate suits."

"Rank-and-file evangelicals are awakening to the moral bankruptcy of leaders of the religious right," says liberal evangelical Randall Balmer, who critically explores the religious right in his recent book, *Thy Kingdom Come*. Dee Wampler, a longtime Christian-right activist and Republican stalwart in Springfield, says that conservative misdeeds woke up plenty of his counterparts in the Bible Belt of southwest Missouri. "We're the worker bees of the party," he says. "A lot of us are disgusted—about the Foley scandal, among other things. We elected them to stand guard and not let this kind of thing happen. I'm hearing a lot of dissension coming out into the open now."

But like most religious-right activists in Missouri, Jaci Winship, who led a grassroots effort by Missourians Against Human Cloning, was defiant. "The battle goes on, and we won't rest until truth wins the victory and deception is defeated," Winship declared. National potentates struck a similar tone. After the election, James Dobson, founder of Focus on the Family, still felt powerful enough to threaten the GOP. "I think we ought to let the Republican leadership know that if they want to change this outcome in two years," he said, "they'd better pay attention to their base, and their base is made up of values voters."

Dobson is right about the Republicans' addiction to the religious right. They have used, manipulated and catered to voters like the Springfield Christians for so long that the party would be lost (and losing) without them. What Dobson doesn't want to recognize is that these voters' "values" are less and less stuck in the wedge-driven paradigms of 1980, or 2004. Balmer, for one, believes that evangelicals could become important swing voters, and thereby expand their power, because they'd be able to sway candidates' positions in both parties toward pro-poor and pro-life stances. Already, he says, "When I talk to audiences of evangelicals they'll say, 'Yes, Jesus' teachings would lead me to vote Democratic—but I simply can't get past the abortion issue.'"

That's why the lessons of Missouri—that religious-right Republicanism is losing its punch and that religious-right voters are beginning to look beyond the tried-and-true dogma—don't merely point to a dilemma for the GOP. With "values voters" increasingly open-minded, Democrats—who won 29 percent of evangelical votes, at least 5 percentage points more than in 2004—will have to grapple with the tangled question of how to claim them without abandoning their prochoice, moderately progay base.

The election results did not, as many pundits have hastily and wishfully surmised, signal the shrinkage of evangelicals' influence over American politics. Instead, what happened in places like Missouri suggests that moral politics is growing more expansive—and less Republican. If that's the case, progressive Democrats might end up remembering November 7, 2006, as a very complicated blessing.

BOB MOSER

Bob Moser is a Nation *contributing writer.*

Power Shifts in the States

When the "blue wave" that swept America November 7 crashed into the Colorado Statehouse, it gave Democrats the governorship and both chambers of the state legislature for the first time since John Kennedy was in the White House. Governor-elect Bill Ritter accepted the vote as a mandate to implement his party's "Colorado Promise" to make basic healthcare available to all Coloradans, strengthen public education, bridge the digital divide and make Colorado the nation's leader in the development of renewable energy using sustainable resources.

The Colorado shift was not unique. In fifteen states, Democrats now control the governor's mansion and both legislative chambers, up from six before the election. In another twenty-five, Democrats control either the governorship or one or more legislative chambers. In all, they have six more governors and more than 300 new legislators nationwide, along with a new crop of activist attorneys general and secretaries of state. With their return to the dominant position they held in the states before the 1994 "Republican revolution" election, the Democrats are positioned to check the Bush Administration from below, reassert their role in the redistricting process, assist a 2008 Democratic presidential candidate in battleground states and implement a radically different vision of government's priorities and potential.

In the fifteen states where Democrats are now in full control, the party has the power to act quickly and decisively. And while there are no guarantees—just as DC Democrats are pressured by special interests and strategists to be cautious and compromising, Democrats in the states feel pulls to the center—there are positive

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COMMENT

signs. Iowa's new Democratic governor, Chet Culver, pledges to work with Democratic legislative majorities to raise the minimum wage to $7.25. In New Hampshire, where for the first time in 130 years Democrats will control the governorship and the legislature, there's already talk of reversing GOP-sponsored restrictions on a woman's right to choose.

Why did things go so right for the Democrats in the states? Democratic efforts to nationalize the election worked. "With a lot of echoes of 1994, when the tide moved almost entirely in the direction of Republicans," says Tim Storey, an analyst with the National Conference of State Legislatures, "this time the tide moved almost entirely in the direction of Democrats." Another factor: Democratic National Committee chair Howard Dean's "50 state strategy," though much derided by Washington insiders, put resources in states where Democrats had long been outgunned. And the recruitment and training of legislative candidates by Progressive Majority, a creation of labor leaders, Congress members and progressive donors, paid off in a big way in states like Colorado, Washington, Ohio and Wisconsin. "When it became clear that this was going to be a good year for Democrats, we were ready to capitalize on it because Progressive Majority had candidates ready to go," says Wisconsin State Representative Mark Pocan.

Pocan, who is active with the Midwest Progressive Elected Officials Network, says, "Democrats in the states now have the power to act on issues that have been stalled in Washington." He's got a point. The shift in power at the state level should slow the God-guns-gays GOP agenda and refocus attention on neglected issues. New York's Democratic Governor-elect, Eliot Spitzer, was a leader in efforts to build multistate coalitions to challenge the Bush Administration on environmental issues when he served as attorney general, and he can do even more as a high-profile governor. Watch for Maine Governor John Baldacci to step up his efforts to get governors, attorneys general and legislators to weigh in on federal trade policy debates with an eye toward defending the ability of states to regulate in the interest of workers, farmers, consumers and the environment. And count on new Democratic secretaries of state like Minnesota's Mark Ritchie and California's Debra Bowen, both of whom displaced Republican incumbents, to be in the forefront of efforts to restore the integrity of elections nationwide.

The power shift will also restore a measure of balance to the redistricting process. Republicans since 1994 have adopted a take-no-prisoners approach to the state-based work of drawing Congressional and legislative district lines, which yielded the party tremendous gains. Democrats should certainly not abuse the process in the same way. But because they'll be "at the table" in so many states going into the redistricting period that begins in 2010, it is likely that there will be more competitive districts at the federal and state levels. That will be enough to create the possibility that the Democratic gains of 2006 will mark only the first stage in a long process of party renewal. JOHN NICHOLS

CALVIN TRILLIN

Trying to Be at Least Civil in Bidding Don Rumsfeld Farewell

The killing in Iraq's gone on so long
Because you think the strong don't say they're wrong.
To be so wrong so often is a curse,
But being arrogantly wrong is worse.
Still, briefings were a hoot. Our favorite feature?
That tone—exactly like a third-grade teacher
Explaining math to those forevermore
Too slow to get promoted to grade four.
And at the Pentagon we'll never see
Another boss who says, "Good gracious me!"
So may you find, as down life's road you're wending,
More folks to whom you're always condescending.

Crisis at Libération

Libération, the French newspaper that emerged from the legendary 1968 student protests, is on the brink of extinction. In June, after more than a year of mounting losses, chief shareholder Edouard de Rothschild, son of an old European banking family, forced out editor in chief Serge July, one of the paper's co-founders, with Sartre. Since then, a publisher selected by Rothschild and an editor chosen by the news staff have shared power in a temporary arrangement. In October the paper went into a six-month "procedure of safeguard"—France's version of Chapter 11.

Libération's troubles are the result of changes both in the media world and at the paper. Once the voice of the antiestablishment, *Libération* has in recent years drifted closer to the political center. Its core readers are an aging segment of the French left, most of whom regard *Libé*, as it is affectionately called, as a symbol of their identity rather than an essential morning read.

Libé's financial woes are not unique. The crisis affecting newspapers worldwide is particularly acute in France, where readers have little appetite for daily papers compared with their counterparts in much of Western Europe and the United States. It's not that they are uninterested in political and social reporting and analysis; France ranks number one in the world in terms of the percentage of people who read newsmagazines. But it drops to 31 percent in the percentage of daily newspaper readers.

This situation is due in part to the nature of France's major general-interest papers, which are edited in Paris and considered national, a perspective that the non-Parisian French often resent. The combined readership of the three major nationals, *Libération*, *Le Figaro* and *Le Monde*, is some 786,000. (By contrast, one of New York City's three daily newspapers has a circulation just under 700,000; the other two are well above.) For a French

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newspaper to succeed, it has to offer something particular: The nationals have always offered a guaranteed point of view. *Le Figaro* is the paper read by the right, *Le Monde* the paper read by the left. *Libération*, with about half the circulation of the other two, has traditionally served the far left.

Libé began in 1973, with Sartre and "Citizen July" at the helm. As former members of a radical left-wing Maoist group that decided print was a better way than protests to fulfill their aims, July and the team stayed true to their roots and made it the people's paper. Today, *Libé* is a tabloid whose cover usually features a provocative photo illustrating the main story, often the human side of a current issue, or an investigative story, although perhaps not what other papers consider the day's lead news. Its photos are striking and numerous, and the writing is accessible, with few of the labyrinthine sentences that characterize *Le Monde*.

Its attraction to France's large intellectual class has been its politics. Yet as July aged and moved toward the center, so did *Libération*. When in May of last year *Libé* encouraged its readers to vote for acceptance of the European Constitution even as polls showed that most people opposed it, readers saw this as a sign that *Libé* had lost its way. The question then became whether it differed enough from *Le Monde* to be worth spending roughly the equivalent of another $1.50 a day on it.

Until now, though, *Libé* has also offered something neither of the other main papers could: guaranteed editorial independence. Whatever July's shortcomings, he fiercely guarded the paper's journalistic freedom—especially precious at a time when *Le Monde* and *Le Figaro* seem compromised. Both papers acquired new major partners in the past three years and landed in bed with arms dealers. Serge Dassault heads the defense conglomerate Groupe Dassault, which owns Socpresse, the publisher of *Le Figaro*. He is also a member of the same center-right party as France's president. Dassault fired *Le Figaro*'s editor and its managing director shortly after he took over, and since then *Le Figaro*'s journalists have complained that stories perceived as hostile to free-market principles or to Groupe Dassault are killed. *Le Monde*'s major outside partner, the media company Lagardère, gets the bulk of its revenues from its interest in the scandal-plagued firm European Aeronautic, Defence and Space Company. Arnaud Lagardère recently removed the editor of one of his other publications for publishing photos offensive to his friend Nicolas Sarkozy, France's interior minister and the center-right's likely presidential candidate next year.

(Continued on Page 22)

Remembering Nation *Friends*

When **Ellen Willis**—feminist, rock critic, political essayist, pioneering writer and editor at the *Village Voice* and valued *Nation* contributor—died November 9, the left lost something precious: a voice for pleasure. In a collection of tributes assembled at www.thenation.com, her former *Voice* colleague Alisa Solomon writes, "Of all the essential insights Ellen's work offered over the last four decades, her insistence on pleasure—in work, politics, day-to-day life—has been, to my mind, the most necessary. Neither hedonistic abandon (which is at its core nihilistic) nor an ironic *Sex in the City*–style insouciance (because Ellen never agreed that there was anything naughty in it), the pleasure she propounded in her brilliant critical essays was part and parcel of freedom." A founder, in 1969, of the radical feminist group Redstockings, on the cutting edge of the women's liberation movement, Willis went on to play a vital role in the "sex wars" of the 1980s, taking on antiporn feminists in battles over exploitation, censorship and the meaning of freedom. As a journalist and activist, Willis recorded and shaped that history. Along the way she inspired and nurtured a generation of feminists and writers, eventually founding NYU's Cultural Reporting and Criticism program. As former *Voice* colleague Richard Goldstein observes, "She brought the values of the '60s into the present without becoming mired in nostalgia, making it possible to imagine that those values may play a role in the future, if we can preserve them."

* * *

We were saddened to learn of the death of novelist **William Styron**, a decent, humorous man who spoke out thoughtfully on political issues in our pages. He signed up (with E.L. Doctorow) to cover the first Gulf War for *The Nation*, but the Pentagon barred reporters from combat zones, force-feeding them propaganda at briefings. Several publications, including this one, along with Styron and others, challenged the policy in a lawsuit, which was rendered moot when the war ended. Styron was in the front rank of World War II–generation novelists. His books, like those of his contemporaries Norman Mailer, Gore Vidal, Kurt Vonnegut and others, enriched America's postwar culture. In his own career Styron resisted categorization, stubbornly following his artistic compass wherever it led in such books as *Sophie's Choice* and *The Confessions of Nat Turner*. Late in life a near-suicidal bout of depression drove him to publish a powerful personal narrative, *Darkness Visible*. He became a champion of fellow sufferers from "melancholia's unspeakable demons" and wrote in *The Nation* about the downsides of psychotropic drugs and the greed of Big Pharma ("Prozac Days, Halcion Nights," January 4/11, 1993).

* * *

Richard Gilman, who died recently, served as drama critic for *The Nation* in the late 1970s and early '80s. Gilman, who had previously written theater criticism for *Commonweal* and *Newsweek*, performed with distinction. His carefully wrought prose was always accessible and lively, and his reviews had solid intellectual and philosophical underpinnings. Writing of Gilman's book *The Confusion of Realms*, John Leonard praised his "confrontation criticism" and said that "to grapple with his perspective" was a "cultural wrestling match." Gilman wrote several erudite books on the theater, taught at the Yale Drama School and served as president of PEN.

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Now What?

It all came out the way it was supposed to. America showed the world it could have an election shorn of front-page accusations of ballot fixing. Horrible senators like Allen and Burns lost narrow races. The Republicans got a pasting. A man who called Alan Greenspan "a political hack" and George Bush "a liar" will be Senate majority leader. A woman elected to Congress with the help of thousands of San Francisco homosexuals, some of them married by Mayor Gavin Newsom, will be Speaker. Who wouldn't want Harry Reid instead of Bill Frist, or Nancy Pelosi instead of fatty Hastert?

It's also the role of elections in properly run Western democracies to remind people that things won't really change at all. You can set your watch by the speed with which the new crowd lowers expectations and announces What Is Not to Be Done. Nowhere is there an item on the Democrats' "must do" list saying, "Reverse plunge toward fascism. Restore habeas corpus and the Bill of Rights." Pelosi says impeachment is off the table.

"Bold new vision" these days means Pelosi pledging a drive to notch up the minimum wage. I don't know about the vineyard, hotel and restaurant that Pelosi co-owns, but the effective minimum wage here in Humboldt County, Northern California, is about $10 an hour, which is what you have to pay a young person to mow the yard. The payout rises to $13 an hour if you want return visits. Maybe on some slave plantation in southern Florida attainment of the federal minimum wage is part of the American Dream, but elsewhere we have to talk about a living wage.

But who cares! No one believes the Democrats are ever going to mess with the system, and that's not why the voters put them back in charge of Congress. They want America out of Iraq. Pronto, just like Representative Jack Murtha said it should be, this time last year. Pelosi knows that, which is why, to her great credit and the chagrin of the *Washington Post* as well as Fox News, she backed Murtha against prowar Steny Hoyer to be House majority leader and said that Jane Harman shouldn't chair the House Intelligence Committee. But the lord giveth and the lord taketh away. Hardly was her Murtha endorsement out of Pelosi's mouth before Harry Reid told his fellow Democrats in the Senate that the issue of what to do in Iraq shouldn't be raised till James Baker and his Iraq Study Group issue their report.

Optimists somehow imagine the Baker Report will explode excitingly under the war's partisans and blow them sky-high. It'll do nothing of the sort. There will be paragraphs of soggy language about the promise of democratic governance and the rule of law in Iraq, raised fingers of warning about the perils of failure, acres of statesmanspeak about the need for multilateral involvement. Probably Baker & Co. think the United States should quit Iraq but can't think of a way of accomplishing this without jump-starting charges over the next two years that America is cutting and running and is this any way to run an empire? McCain's saying that already.

There is a ferocious battle in the offing. On one side are the majority of Americans sickened by the war in Iraq, who spoke clearly on November 7. Their prime institutional ally is the uniformed military, which was against the war from the start and which gave Jack Murtha the briefings that emboldened him to take his stand last year. Their political champions of the hour are Pelosi and Murtha, and on the Republican side, Senator Chuck Hagel. Their most plausible presidential candidate, Russell Feingold, has just said he won't run for the nomination.

On the other side are the massed legions of cold war liberalism, of whom the notorious neocons—now denouncing Bush and Rumsfeld—are but one battalion. Remember the origins of the neocons, as shock troops of the Israel lobby. Back in the mid-1970s Norman Podhoretz, Irving Kristol, Albert Wohlstetter and the others saw the impending defeat in Vietnam and feared that the McGovernite peaceniks would rot the resolve of the Democratic Party to stand behind Israel. So they fanned out into the Committee on the Present Danger and the editorial page of the *Wall Street Journal*, stoked up the furnaces of the new cold war and greased the wheels of the Reagan campaign.

The apex neocons are a pretty discredited lot these days, but there are legions like them spread across the nation's think tanks and policy institutes, all imbued with the same fears that reverberated across the *Journal*'s editorial page, *Commentary* and *The New Republic* a generation ago: that America's "resolve" will soften; that there will be accommodation with Iran; that Israel will be abandoned. And in fact such fears are now more vivid. Thirty years ago the Israel lobby wasn't being excoriated by mainstream professors from Harvard and Chicago. Thirty years ago the name of Israel—blowing apart children in Beit Hanoun—didn't stink in as many nostrils as it does today.

So the stakes are very high, and the party of permanent war—represented at its purest distillation in the form of senators like Joe Biden and Congressmen like Rahm Emanuel—is regrouping for a counterattack, their numbers refreshed by a phalanx of incoming Blue Dogs, ranged against the sixty or so "Out Now" Democrats. You think prowar Tom Lantos will be an improvement on antiwar Jim Leach as chair of the House International Relations Committee? The Democratic foreign policy establishment cannot and will not tolerate the notion of cut and run in Iraq. Expect reassertions of the essential nobility of the attack that ousted Saddam, a deprecation of the destruction of Iraq as a society, a minimization of the outrages committed by US forces, evocations of the bloodbath that would accompany "overhasty" US withdrawal. (Weird. Your attack triggers the killing of maybe half a million since 2003, and you claim anti–bloodbath credentials?) Expect a fierce campaign—spearheaded by the Democratic establishment and the surviving neocons—to wage a "better" war. Expect a presidential campaign waged among warmongers, from Clinton to McCain by way of Giuliani. The voters spoke up, but that's the last chance they'll get, at least at the ballot box, for another two years. Hagel/Liz Edwards in 2008! ■

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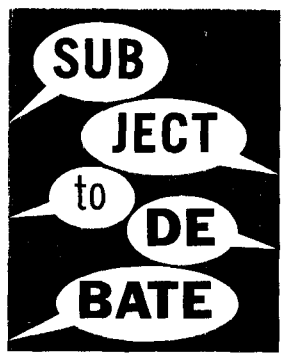
KATHA POLLITT

Why They Lost



They lost because they were mean and let it show. They lost because they were bullies and kicked sand in too many faces. They lost because they said their opponents were godless criminals who wanted Osama to win. They lost because of Iraq. They lost because they kept saying the economy was great to people with bills and pink slips crumpled on the kitchen table. They lost because voters wanted to let the other team screw up for a change. They lost because fourteen months after Katrina, New Orleans is still a wasteland. They lost because of Mark Foley, Macaca, Jack Abramoff and Ted Haggard, the evangelical preacher with the male prostitute and the meth. They lost because Katherine Harris just wouldn't go away. They lost because people thought it over and decided they liked the Constitution the way it was. They lost because of that weird coin scandal in Ohio. They lost because there are limits. They lost because Bush thought it made a difference if he stopped saying we had to "stay the course." They lost because women don't want to be forced to bear their rapists' babies, even in South Dakota, and they don't want the attorney general investigating their abortions, even in Kansas. They lost because Bob Sherwood's mistress called 911 saying she had locked herself in a bathroom because he was trying to strangle her. They lost because they lied so much and stole so much, the other side started to look honest. They lost because you can only outlaw gay marriage once, and they'd already done that in most places. They lost because they couldn't explain why the mission wasn't accomplished and all those people were dead. They lost because torture is not just wrong, it's embarrassing. They lost because Jesus didn't want them for a sunbeam after all.

You've probably had enough election analysis by now. To sum up: The Democrats won because they ran conservative candidates in conservative places—unless they won because people aren't all that conservative. They won because Rahm Emanuel and Charles Schumer raised a ton of money and targeted it to key races. But wait—maybe they won because the much-mocked, rarely credited Howard Dean was right: His 50 state strategy, building actually functioning parties in every state and conceding no race, however doubtful, forced the Republicans to spend money and energy and political capital defending races they had taken for granted. Early pundits like David Brooks said they won in some places because they courted the evangelicals with smiles for God and guns and frowns about abortion and gay marriage. Actually, probably not: The polls I've seen show the white born-again vote staying with the Republicans, 71 percent, only a smidgen less than 2004.

The gender gap, on the other hand, was back, with 56 percent of women going for the Dems versus 52 percent of men. But what's the matter with white people? White women still favor Republicans (51 percent) down from 56 percent in 2004, and white men still like Republicans a lot (54 percent). Come on, ladies, wise up! These are the pols who want you to quit your jobs, home-school your kids and get your groceries at the church food pantry. Thank God for black people (89 percent Democratic, America's smartest voters) and, woo-hoo, Hispanics—who went from 55 percent pro-Dem to 70 percent in just two short years. English-only *that*, Karl Rove. And then there were the young, ah, the young!—only 24 percent managed to drag themselves away from Facebook and beer pong long enough to cast a ballot. But at least the ones who voted went 60 percent for Democrats.

So it was a good day. Bipartisanship fared poorly. Goodbye, NARAL-endorsed Republicans Lincoln Chafee and, in Connecticut, Nancy Johnson and by 91 votes Rob Simmons. But the election matters as much for what it voted out as for what it voted in. (As if to prove my point, Senate majority leader Harry Reid has told the *Washington Post* that one of the Dems' first priorities will be to increase the military budget by $75 billion.) Some of our victories, moreover, are not as victorious as they look from a distance. The defeat of the abortion ban in South Dakota was terrific, but Healthy Families, Planned Parenthood, NARAL and the Democrats missed a huge chance to build an ongoing grassroots political prochoice movement. Their activism was low-key and limited to the ban itself, and their focus was on the most limited objection, the lack of an exception for rape and incest. Result: The ban went down, but out of twenty-two prochoice Democratic women running, only two won (a third is in a runoff). Every antichoice woman incumbent prevailed. The state legislature remains controlled by the same people who voted for the ban. No case has been made for abortion rights for women who have voluntary sex. No case has been made for expanding reproductive rights generally, in a state where the Catholic Church controls a lot of the healthcare system. If the antichoicers pass a ban that would exempt sex-crime victims, polls show it has strong support, even more among women than men.

It's always a bad idea to rely on your opponents being knaves and fools who go too far and appall the voters. This time it worked, in South Dakota and the nation. But what about next time?

* * *

There are not many magazine writers who are also thinkers, and Ellen Willis, who died November 9 at the much too youthful age of 64, was one of the clearest, sharpest and deepest. In everything she wrote—for *The New Yorker*, the *Village Voice*, *Salon* and many other publications, including, all too rarely, *The Nation*—she was committed to liberation, to pleasure and to serious engagement with political ideas—ideas she might find anywhere, in a rock song or a movie or the way the tabloids covered Monica Lewinsky. The short-term tactics and positioning and voter-friendly sloganeering that obsess political junkies held little interest for her. Instead, she taught us how to think about what it means to be modern people. Her last long piece, "Escape From Freedom: What's the Matter With Tom Frank (and the Lefties Who Love Him)?," was a masterpiece of engaged analysis that, like much of her writing in recent years, should have received more attention than it did. I'll miss our all-too-infrequent conversations and the lift of the heart I felt whenever I saw her byline. ■

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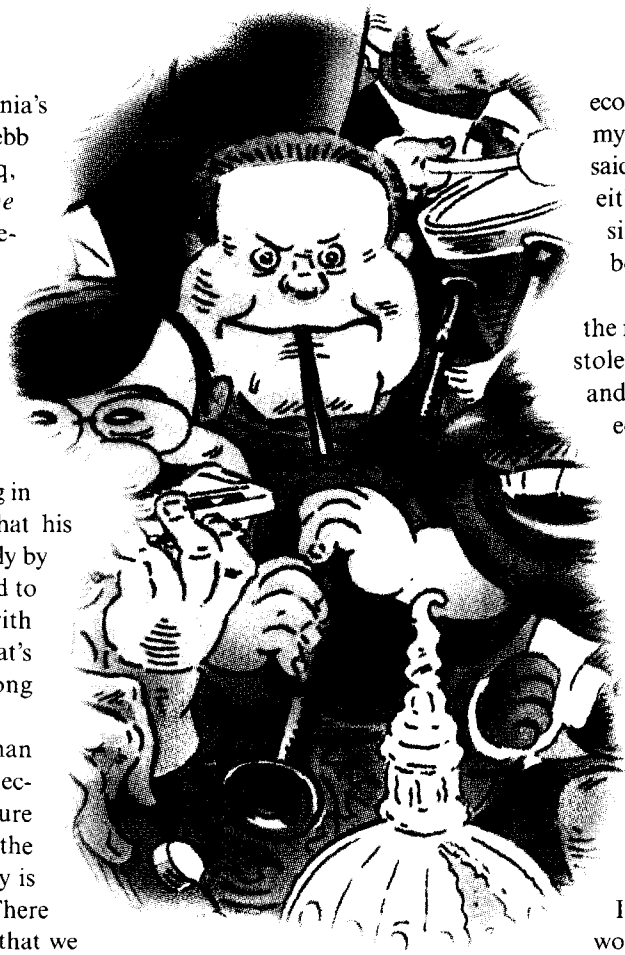
ARTICLES

THE NEW DEMOCRATIC POPULISM



by CHRISTOPHER HAYES

Everyone wants Virginia's Senator-elect Jim Webb to talk about Iraq, but the man *The Weekly Standard* recently called a "blood-and-soil conservative" wants to talk about something else: economic inequality. The day after he accepted George Allen's concession, Webb barely let his NPR interviewer get a word in edgewise before jumping in to correct the misperception that his bid for office was motivated solely by opposition to the war. "I decided to run because of my concern...with the economic breakdown that's happened in this country along class lines."

Class lines? Mr. Webb is a man who has railed against the "collectivist taming" of American culture by Marxists and has served in the Reagan Administration. So why is he talking like Eugene Debs? "There are huge income inequalities...that we haven't seen since the 1880s," he said on NPR. "And wages and salaries...are at an all-time low as a percentage of wealth."

As idiosyncratic as he is, Webb is not an anomaly. He's part of a broader trend that has been obscured by the fast-congealing conventional wisdom that the election results were driven chiefly by the ongoing disaster in Iraq. If you drill down a little into those results, it's clear that Iraq and Republican scandal can't account for all the Democratic victory. Consider the Democrats' success at the state level. The party picked up six governors, nine legislative chambers and more than 300 state legislative seats, none of which can plausibly be ascribed to discontent over Iraq.

As Webb suggests, the hidden story of the election was the appeal of economic populism in a country whose middle class is increasingly feeling the squeeze. Coast to coast, Democrats running for local and national office campaigned on raising the minimum wage, repealing welfare for Big Oil and opposing trade deals lacking protection for workers and the environment, and their message resonated with an electorate anxious about the economy. Half of all voters rated the economy not good or poor, and a full 69 percent said their family's economic situation had either gotten worse or stayed the same since the last election. Democrats won both these groups by wide margins.

Ironically, in the weeks leading up to the midterm election, the Republican Party stole a page from the Democrats' playbook and attempted to shift the focus toward the economy and away from the manifestly unpopular Iraq War. The thinking was that the years of relatively strong GDP growth coupled with relatively low unemployment would redound to the ruling party's benefit, perhaps canceling out the anger over Iraq and corruption. The GOP's strategy both worked and backfired. Voters did focus on the economy, but they didn't reward Republicans. Exit polls showed that 39 percent of voters rated the economy as "extremely important" (roughly the same percentage as those who said the same about Iraq and corruption), but Democrats won those voters by twenty points.

This shouldn't be surprising. Despite relatively strong growth, manageable inflation, high corporate profits and a bullish stock market, real wages continue to stagnate, productivity gains continue to be captured by the wealthiest 1 percent, income inequality has continued to get worse and, as Jacob Hacker argues persuasively in *The Great Risk Shift*, America's middle class finds itself living with far more risk and income volatility than it did a generation ago.

None of these trends are new, but over the past six years the problems have grown so noticeable that even the neoliberal economists who crafted the much-celebrated Clinton economic agenda have begun to focus on correcting the perversely inequitable distribution of the fruits of economic success. After years of reading the likes of David Sirota and Thomas Frank urging Democrats to embrace their inner populists, Dems finally started getting the message: Aside from opposition to the war, the Democrats focused on attacking subsidies to Big Oil, blasting the corruption endemic to a system in which cor-

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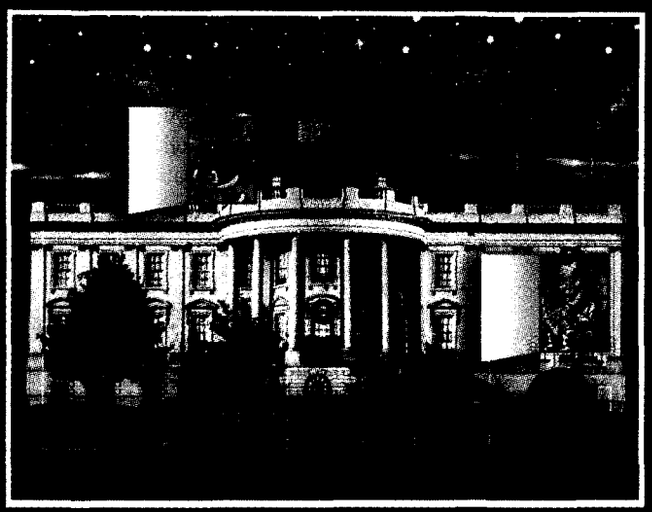

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porate special interests call the shots and advocating for "fair trade" over the so-called "free trade" agreements that benefit capital over labor. Even the Democratic Leadership Council, the most outspoken opponent of economic populism, has begun to come around. In 1995 *Roll Call* reported that "DLC officials think that, if Clinton calls for a minimum-wage increase in the State of the Union...it could wreak the same political damage as his 1993 vow to veto any healthcare bill that did not provide universal coverage." By this election, the DLC was firmly behind an increase in the minimum wage.

In fact, the minimum wage just might have been Tuesday night's most underreported story. Not only has the Democratic Congress pledged to raise the minimum wage within the first 100 hours but in the six states that featured ballot initiatives to raise the minimum wage above the national—Ohio, Missouri, Montana, Nevada, Arizona and Colorado—every one passed. In Montana it took 73 percent of the vote, and in Missouri 76 percent. Consider that the much-publicized stem-cell-research initiative passed in Missouri by only a few percentage points. That means hundreds of thousands pulled the lever for an increased minimum wage and against funding for stem-cell research.

"One of the interesting facts about this campaign is it has been able to bring together people across many political lines," the Rev. Paul Sherry, national organizer for the Let Justice Roll Living Wage Campaign, told me. "I do a lot of speaking around the country, and when I say that a person working at $5.15 an hour full time makes $10,710 a year, you can see people's eyes light up as they begin to think of their own circumstances." (Not only did the minimum-wage initiatives run a clean sweep but their conservative counterparts fared poorly. Three states—Maine, Nebraska and Oregon—featured ballot referendums modeled on the Grover Norquist–backed Taxpayer Bill of Rights, which severely limits the growth in state government taxing and spending levels. All of them lost.)

At the national level, cable pundits almost immediately focused on a handful of winning Democrats with conservative stances on social issues—Jon Tester's A rating from the NRA, Bob Casey's opposition to choice and, obsessively, former NFL quarterback Heath Shuler, who defeated incumbent Charles Taylor in North Carolina's 11th District while opposing abortion, gay rights and a guest-worker program for immigrants. But what the pundits didn't mention was the role in Shuler's victory of the district's opposition to "free trade" deals. The area's textile industry has been gutted by NAFTA, so when it came time to vote on CAFTA, Taylor was caught between his district, which wanted him to vote no, and the GOP House leadership, which wanted him to vote yes. So he skipped the vote altogether and CAFTA passed by one vote.

During the campaign, Shuler hammered Taylor for "selling out American families," and he wasn't alone in using trade as a wedge issue. A postelection analysis by Public Citizen found that campaigns cut twenty-five ads attacking free-trade deals, and that trade played a significant role in more than a dozen House races won by Democrats. In the entire election, Public Citizen noted, "no incumbent fair trader was beaten by a 'free trader.'"

"Democrats have coalesced in favor of trade policy reform over the past decade as President Bill Clinton's NAFTA, WTO

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and China trade deals not only failed to deliver the promised benefits but caused real damage," said Lori Wallach, director of Public Citizen's Global Trade Watch division. To get a sense of just how far the consensus on trade in the Democratic Party has come, consider that Shuler was recruited to run for office by none other than Rahm Emanuel, the man charged with ramming NAFTA through a skeptical Democratic Congress in 1993.

Indeed, back when Emanuel was the NAFTA enforcer, he met some of his stiffest resistance from a young freshman Congressman from Ohio named Sherrod Brown, whose twelve-point victory over incumbent Senator Mike DeWine was one of election night's highlights. In a column a few weeks before the election, David Brooks called Brown's Senate contest "the most important political race in the country," because as a "full-bore economic populist" Brown represented the most "vibrant strain" of the Democratic Party.

If there's going to be a center-left majority, it is going to rest on a coalition bound by a shared interest in economic justice.

Brown is an across-the-board progressive: a supporter of gay rights, abortion rights and civil rights who voted against the Iraq War and the Patriot Act (though, disappointingly, *for* the Military Commissions Act during the campaign). In 2005 *National Journal* ranked him as more liberal than 86 percent of House members. But he managed to avoid being sliced apart by wedge issues or tarred and feathered as an out-of-touch liberal by focusing with Terminator-like persistence on a simple economic populist message: "fighting for the middle class," as his campaign manager John Ryan put it to me. Ryan says that even when DeWine attempted to change the topic or attack Brown, the campaign spent 50 percent of its airtime in TV ads responding to the charge "and 50 percent of Sherrod looking onscreen with a working-class message and a middle-class message."

In some ways Ohio's a special case, having been particularly hard hit by globalization and with 83 percent of voters saying the economy was extremely or very important. The race came down to the have-nots outnumbering the haves: 37 percent of voters rated the economy excellent or good, and DeWine won their vote by forty-four points. But 62 percent rated the economy not good or poor, and Brown won those voters by almost fifty points.

I asked Ryan if, given Ohio's particularities, he thought Brown's message would be applicable in other parts of the country. "Take Columbus," Ryan said. "Columbus is so much like the rest of the country, demographically, that companies from all over the country conduct focus groups there. There's not a lot of factories, and it might be the one part of the state that might have gained some jobs with NAFTA. We went down to Columbus and we tested [Brown's trade message] to see if it would work. The difference was that in Dayton people would say, I lost two jobs because of NAFTA, and in Columbus people said, I know someone who lost a job. It was one half-step away, but people got it—people understood that the government was not on our side." In addition, Ryan pointed to Brown's success in southern Ohio, which is by far the most conservative part of the state. In three southern counties, Brown's support exceeded the number of registered Democrats by at least 20,000 votes.

Brown's successful populism and that of other Democrats hasn't gone unnoticed. Commentators have raised the specter of the rise of a "Lou Dobbs"–like wing of the party whose economic arguments are inextricably linked to a racialized nationalism, the kind of populism that's equally comfortable bashing corporations that outsource jobs and "illegal aliens" who take away Americans' jobs here at home, and whose opposition to the Iraq War, like Pat Buchanan's, is rooted in an America-first isolationism. To be sure, economic populism has a dark side. It's a fine line between railing against corporate-written trade deals because they hurt workers the world over, and scapegoating the brown-skinned Other who is stealing our jobs. Democrats haven't always walked this line carefully: There was more than a whiff of demagoguery in John Kerry's nomination acceptance speech about "closing firehouses in America" while opening them in Baghdad (why shouldn't Iraqis have firehouses?). That subtext ran through many Democrats' ads in this past cycle, as they rushed to declare their opposition to "amnesty," a word as racially loaded today as "quotas" was in the 1980s. Heath Shuler's ads attacking his opponent for "selling out our families" also ridiculed him for voting to set up a scholarship for Russian students (the horror!), while pledging that he would "put American families first." Even Sherrod Brown talked in television ads about the need for "tighter borders."

It's the left's perennial dilemma: Populism is a fundamentally majoritarian mode of politics—the have-nots versus the haves, the many versus the few—but a central part of the left's most noble tradition is protecting the rights and interests of minorities. Yet if there's going to be a center-left majority in this country, its electoral strength is going to rest on a coalition bound by a shared interest in economic justice. The Democrats face several obstacles to making that coalition stick. First, the infusion of corporate cash that's about to flow into the now-majority party will provide a disincentive to go after corporate power in ways that voters clearly want. In the past, when caught between the interests of their donors and of their constituents, too often Democrats have advocated for the former: Just look at the vote on the bankruptcy bill. Second, the Democrats' continued growth rests on a burgeoning Latino population, as well as on young people, who are more socially liberal than the population at large. So whose interests are going to get top priority?

Though difficult, it's not an impossible situation to navigate. With the power to control the agenda, Democrats can leverage the electoral strength of economic populism to protect minority interests by making sure that socially conservative members never get the chance to cast a vote in support of things like a marriage amendment or a "partial birth" abortion ban. But that strategy will work only if the Democrats can enforce real party discipline and prevent socially conservative Dems from defecting on key issues like stem-cell funding, choice, abstinence education and immigration.

Christopher Hayes, a Puffin Foundation Writing Fellow at The Nation Institute, is a senior editor of In These Times.

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In the short term, Nancy Pelosi's strategy seems to focus on the economic issues with the broadest range of support. Her agenda for the first 100 hours of her term as Speaker of the House is a package of mainstream, popular, progressive bills that would benefit a variety of the Democrats' constituencies: a raise in the minimum wage, which would greatly benefit blacks, Latinos and single women; a cut in interest rates for student loans, which would benefit young voters; and bulk negotiation of Medicare prescription drugs, which would benefit the elderly. "The Republicans are here to concentrate the wealth of our country in the top 1 percent, and all the power that comes with that is at the expense of the middle class and those striving to be in the middle class—and that's just plain wrong," Pelosi said in a conference call the day after the election. "That's why we need to get a progressive economic agenda out there. As long as I get my caucus organized around that, that's more important to me than having a checklist." ■

THE CONSERVATIVE ERA HAS ENDED. BUT ARE DEMOCRATS READY TO PLOT A NEW DIRECTION?

Watershed

WILLIAM GREIDER

The Democratic Party was not really ready for this. Democrats have been in the wilderness so long—since Ronald Reagan launched the conservative era twenty-five years ago—that older liberals began to think it was a life sentence. Bill Clinton was the party's rock star; he made people feel good (and occasionally cringe), but he governed in idiosyncratic ways that accommodated the right and favored small gestures over big ideas. The party adopted his risk-averse style. Its substantive meaning and political strength deteriorated further.

PETER O. ZIERLEIN

Then George W. Bush came along as the ultimate nightmare—even more destructive of government and utterly oblivious to the consequences.

The 2006 election closed out the conservative era with the voters' blast of rejection. Democrats are liberated again to become—what? Something new and presumably better, maybe even a coherent party.

This is the political watershed everyone senses. The conservative order has ended, basically because it didn't work—did not produce general well-being. People saw that conservatives had no serious intention of creating smaller government. They were too busy delivering boodle and redistributing income and wealth from the many to the few. Plus, Republicans got the country into a bad war, as liberals had decades before.

On the morning after, my 6-year-old grandson was watching TV as he got ready for school. He saw one of those national electoral maps in which blue states wiped away red states. "Water takes fire," he said. Water nourishes, fire destroys. How astute is that? It could be the theme for our new politics.

With Democrats in charge of the House and the Senate, we can now return to a reality-based politics that nourishes rather than destroys. The party's preoccupation with "message" should take a back seat to "substance"—addressing the huge backlog of disorders and injuries produced by conservative governance. This changeover will be long and arduous. But at least it can now begin.

Republicans lost, but their ideological assumptions are deeply embedded in government, the economy and the social order. Many Democrats have internalized those assumptions, others are afraid to challenge them. It will take years, under the best circumstances, for Democrats to recover nerve and principle and imagination—if they do.

But this is a promising new landscape. Citizens said they want change. Getting out of Iraq comes first, but economic reform is close behind: the deteriorating middle class, globalization and its damaging impact on jobs and wages, corporate excesses and social abuses, the corruption of politics. Democrats ran on these issues, and voters chose them.

The killer question: Do Democrats stick with comfortable Washington routines or make a new alliance with the people who just elected them? Progressives can play an influential role as ankle-biting enforcers. They then have to get up close and personal with Democrats. Explain that evasive, empty gestures won't cut it anymore. Remind the party that it is vulnerable to similar retribution from voters as long as most Americans don't have a clue about what Democrats stand for.

The first order of business is taking down Bush. The second front is the fight within the Democratic Party over its soul and sense of direction. These are obviously intertwined, but let's start with Bush and how Democrats can contain his ebbing powers. This is not a philosophical discussion. Events are already moving rapidly.

Everyone talks up postelection bipartisanship, and voters *are* weary of partisan cat fights. But that doesn't mean selling them out to get along with the other party. If Bush wants compromise, let him start by promising not to nominate any more hard-right-wingers to the federal judiciary. Harry Reid, the new Senate majority leader, could respond by promising not to confirm any nominees if Bush doesn't keep his word.

The tables are turned now. Democrats will control the purse-strings of government. Beyond keeping post offices open, they can kill anything Bush proposes. They have the high ground, but they can now also be blamed for what goes wrong. For the

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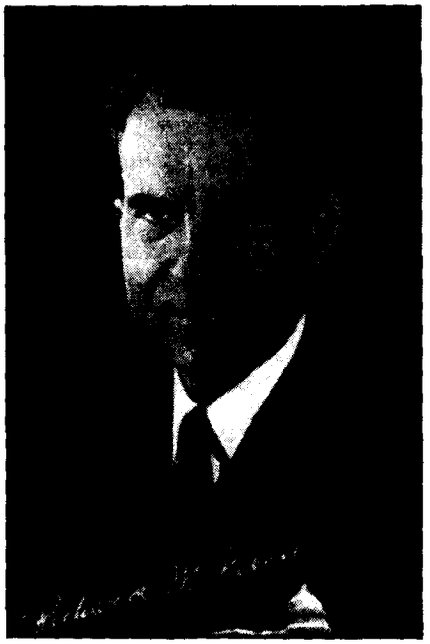
THE BLUE RIBBON REPORT RICHARD NIXON CHOSE TO BURY

After Richard Nixon flattened the Democrats as soft on crime in the '68 election, the President-elect faced a dilemma. There's not much the White House can do to impact crime. The thugs people are afraid of — burglars, robbers, rapists, murderers — are the business of state courts. Then somebody mentioned drugs.[1]*



In a textbook example of fear manipulation, Nixon warned the country that a plague of unimaginable proportions was about to engulf the nation. "The problem has assumed the dimensions of a national emergency," he said.[2] To fight the pushers on their own terms, he would need emergency powers — preventive detention, unorthodox strike forces, more freedom to search, wire tap, and arrest.

For scientific support, he appointed former Republican Pennsylvania Governor Ray Shafer to head a National Commission on Marijuana and Drug Abuse. He told Gov. Shafer to treat marijuana just like heroin despite the "obvious differences between marijuana and other drugs."[3] He was even more direct with chief of staff Bob Haldeman. "I want a Goddamn strong statement about marijuana...that just tears the ass out of them."[4]

But after months of testimony from academics, medical experts, lawmen and health professionals, the facts overwhelmed the myths. The report was devastating: "Marijuana use, in and of itself, is neither causative of, nor directly associated with crime..."[5] It found no basis for the gateway theory. Alcohol, it said, was probably a greater danger, and the report concluded that personal use of marijuana should no longer be a crime.[6]

The President hit the roof. He complained to Haldeman, "...every one of the bastards that are out for legalizing marijuana is Jewish."[7]

In the face of the shooting war in Vietnam the Shafer Commission was quickly forgotten but the consequences of that cover-up are with us still. Since the 1972 release of that official report recommending legalization, we have arrested more than 14 million Americans[8] at a cost of over $100 billion[9] and the use of marijuana is undiminished.[10]

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* Visit http://www.csdp.org/publicservice/nixon06notes.htm for citations, including full text of the Shafer Report

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first time in a dozen years, Democrats have the power to alter the governing fundamentals.

Ending the war cannot be compromised. Voters want out "now," as soon as possible. They did not endorse a couple more years of US occupation, many more lost lives and wasted billions. If Democratic leaders get that wrong, it becomes their war too, and Americans will not be forgiving. A coherent alternative that deserves bipartisan support may emerge from the Baker-Hamilton group. But, if not, Democrats should be principled critics and draw up their own road map.

Let Iraqis decide their own fate. Telling them to split up into three parts sounds like more colonialist intervention. Iraqis are robbed of true sovereignty as long as occupying Americans are present. Democrats can come up with a plausible timetable for withdrawal, accompanied by rational foreign-policy steps like direct talks with Iran and other Middle Eastern powers to defuse the sectarian violence and to arrange a manageable exit for the US military.

Do the Democrats have the stomach for a fight, not only with the GOP but with the monied interests that finance both parties?

Congress cannot command troops, but it has enormous leverage to coax and prod Pentagon policy through appropriations and other legislation. Cutting off funds in the midst of war is not going to happen—it never has in US history—but the military itself could become a valuable source of strategic ideas, both in hearings and through back-door communications. Bush's promised "victory" in Iraq is not an option.

The Pentagon, in fact, is especially vulnerable to Congressional pressure, because its spending is scandalously out of control. Rumsfeld allowed it, and the services took advantage of his open checkbook. Emergency "war" spending is headed toward $507 billion and covers numerous projects with no relevance to Iraq or Afghanistan. House and Senate committees can force out the facts and expose this outrage now. If they don't, it will haunt them later when they try to reduce federal deficits.

When Democrats take up their commitment to reducing Bush's budget deficits, they face a big problem up front. The economy is heading toward recession. Shrinking federal deficits would only make things worse. Dems need to back off that pledge and consider stimulative spending instead.

They can look for money elsewhere. One promising source lies in the many investigations and hearings Senate and House committees are planning to expose war-profiteering—Halliburton's no-bid contracts, obscene subsidies and tax breaks for Big Oil and Big Pharma, the rank corruption that has essentially looted government programs. Properly managed, these inquiries can produce popular anger and demands for recovering the public capital carried off by private interests.

The straightforward way to achieve this is taxation. For three decades, Washington has been cutting taxes for corporate and financial interests, not to mention the wealthy. Democrats have to find ways to stop intoning this conservative tax-cutting mantra by showing that government has been robbed and ordinary families are the losers. Will voters be upset that Democrats are recovering public money by raising taxes on the plunderers? I think they will cheer.

Representative Charles Rangel, the next chair of the House Ways and Means Committee, has said he will not attempt to repeal Bush's outrageous tax cuts for the wealthy—but instead let them expire in 2010. That kills estate-tax repeal and puts other measures in terminal jeopardy. Democrats should go on the offense and develop a tax-shift strategy that increases taxes on corporations and capital in order to finance tax relief for struggling families, middle-class and below. Last-Ditch Bush may veto this, but let's see how many nervous Republicans vote against it.

All this depends, however, on the question of whether Democrats have the stomach for a fight, not only with Bush and the GOP but with the business and financial interests that underwrite both parties. We don't know yet, but a test case may come soon. Corporate leaders, investment bankers and the insurance industry are lobbying to gut the modest regulations enacted after Enron and to disable investor lawsuits against fraud on Wall Street and in corporate boardrooms.

Which side will Democrats be on? In the 1990s leading senators supported big money against the interests of injured investors, including pension funds. Deviating Democrats included Chris Dodd, Joe Lieberman, Charles Schumer and Joe Biden, to name a few. If they are on the wrong side this time, voters should hear about it.

This tension between liberal economic values and the center-right economics of Clinton is the party's great divide. Clintonistas-in-waiting—awaiting Hillary's White House—still dominate party affairs in Washington. But the facts have changed. Voters expressed their contempt for Republicans in 2006. They did not suggest they want the same behavior from Democrats.

Is the new Congress reflected in economic populists like Senator-elect Jim Webb of Virginia and free-trade critics like Senator-elect Sherrod Brown? Or pro-gun, antiabortion conservatives from the South and Midwest who might pull the party rightward? Both before and after the election, major media, led by the *New York Times* and *Washington Post*, repeatedly emphasized that no leftward ideological shift would occur, because Democrats are moving rightward. This was bogus, way too simplistic. It overlooked the fact that 100 or more candidates ran aggressively on liberal or populist economic issues—against unregulated free trade and the offshoring of American jobs, against special interests, corporate excesses and social abuses. The Blue Dog and New Democrat caucuses will expand, but the Progressive Caucus will, too, and will remain the largest—at seventy-one members.

The spin originated with DLC types, and a principal source was Representative Rahm Emanuel, chair of the Democratic Congressional Campaign Committee, who recruited many of the candidates. "Emanuel and other top Democrats told their members they cannot allow the party's liberal wing to dominate the agenda next year," the *Post* reported. If Speaker Nancy Pelosi intends to be in charge, she might not want Representative Emanuel standing at her back.

The party's ideological debate is under way privately at a more serious level. Robert Rubin, the influential former Treasury

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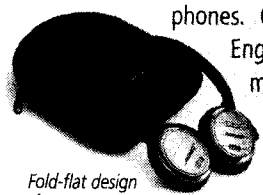

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Secretary and executive chair at Citigroup, launched the Hamilton Project this past spring to head off the rising rebellion within party ranks against corporate-led globalization. He is proposing various measures, but holds fast to "free market" principle: Don't interfere with the global markets and multinationals.

Organized labor has taken up Rubin's invitation to talk and is countering with its ideas for fundamental reforms. Labor leaders do not expect to change Rubin's mind. Their objective is to show Democratic incumbents that they are caught in a serious bind—between their injured voters and multinational investment bankers. Democrats will have nothing meaningful to say to them as long as the party adheres to the economic orthodoxy. They need debate and an aggressive agenda that stanches the bleeding for Americans and saves the global system by reforming it.

Nancy Pelosi has the power to break through the risk-averse habits. She and liberal allies like Representative George Miller are playing shrewd, not reckless politics. But the Democrats don't have forever to establish bona fides with the electorate. A year from now, if the party looks like the same old timid crowd, Democrats will be in trouble of their own making.

This is where activists can develop influence inside Congress. They have to work on persuading Pelosi, Reid and key House and Senate chairs to take the larger risks. The breadth of the Democratic victory gives them license to push a more ambitious agenda. The weak public regard for Democrats gives them an incentive. The House-Senate majorities enable the party to pass a lot of urgent progressive reforms—regulating global warming, for example—that may not become law but would create forward momentum and draw "nay" votes from reactionary Republicans.

Progressives must develop an inside-outside strategy that engages this new Democratic Congress intimately while it rallies citizens at large to add their voices, too. This is going to be a hard, long struggle. Turning around a political party and politics isn't accomplished in one or two election cycles.

But some newly elected Democrats found a smart formula in 2006. Talk to people about their lives and really listen to what people, not polls, say. Then offer solutions, not just rhetoric, that might work. If they learn to do this conscientiously, pretty soon Democrats might begin sounding like a political party. ■

Letter From Venezuela
by Chesa Boudin

THE LAND OF CHAVISMO

As Venezuelans prepare to go to the polls December 3, expectations are that President Hugo Chávez will easily win reelection, thanks to his wide base of support among the country's poor and marginalized majority. In this election, however, people will be voting not just on hopes and expectations but rather on the proven track record of Chávez's "Bolivarian Revolution" and its gains in alleviating poverty.

An innovative series of social programs known as *misiones*, or missions—set up to parallel ineffective and often exclusionary government agencies or services, and largely funded through oil sales, which account for 47 percent of government revenue and 80 percent of exports—has delivered concrete benefits to Venezuela's poor. As one example, roughly 3 million Venezuelans have enrolled in one of the four free educational missions—basic adult literacy, primary school, high school equivalency and university—since the programs began in 2003. Recently, in one adult literacy class, the pride of the students was palpable as one after another went to the chalkboard to transcribe—albeit with a few errors—short sentences that their facilitator read aloud. One woman in her late 60s told me after class, "This is the first time in my life when Venezuela has had a government dedicated to inclusion, not exclusion."

A mission that brings doctors to live in poor neighborhoods, towns and villages to provide free, easily accessible healthcare is so popular that in 2004 alone it logged more visits than the entire public and private healthcare systems combined over the previous five years. There is a job-training mission, and a mission that provides food subsidies and soup kitchens. These and the other missions offer much-needed services and dramatically increase the quality of life for millions of Venezuelans, often in ways that are not easily quantifiable in commonly reported poverty indicators.

Even in the statistics, however, changes are evident. According to Venezuela's most recent census, the number of households living in poverty has dropped from 42.8 percent in 1999, when Chávez took office, to 33.9 percent in early 2006. Households living in extreme poverty dropped from 17.1 percent to 10.6 percent during the same period. The poorest quintile of the population has seen its consumption power more than double. Official unemployment has been cut by more than half, to around 10 percent, although most jobs are either in the public sector or in the "informal" sector.

Mark Weisbrot, co-director of the Center for Economic and Policy Research, in Washington, says that while poverty statistics tend to follow overall economic growth (and Venezuela's economy has been growing at record rates as global energy prices have soared), the improvements are nonetheless remarkable. "The Chávez government has only had three years of stability and control over the oil industry," he says. "In that time they

Chesa Boudin is a co-author of The Venezuelan Revolution: 100 Questions—100 Answers. *In 2005 he worked as an intern on President Chávez's foreign policy team, doing research for a master's degree in Latin American public policy at Oxford University on a Rhodes Scholarship.*

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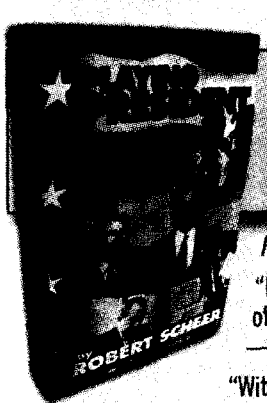

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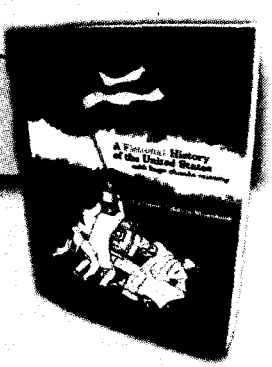

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have dramatically increased access to healthcare and education.... I don't know of anywhere else in the hemisphere that has made these kinds of gains."

There is ample room to be critical of President Chávez and his Administration. Most English-language news reports demonize his government, focusing on the continuing culture of corruption, the fear of centralization of power, high crime rates, and close ties with Cuba and Iran. But the missions and Chávez's deeply charismatic style of government have mobilized historically marginalized sectors of society into a powerful political base. If Chávez wins the December election, it will be the third time in less than eight years that his mandate has been confirmed in internationally observed elections. "Under Chávez we have gotten a taste of what it is like to run the country, to have access to social, political and educational opportunities," says Héctor González, who grew up with six siblings high in the hills above Caracas in a dangerous, impoverished barrio called La Vega. "That feeling of empowerment is not something people in the barrios will give up easily."

'Under Chávez we have gotten a taste of what it is like...to have access to social, political and educational opportunities.' —Héctor González

Chávez's accomplishments have come even as his political opposition has remained committed to his ouster—often through extra-constitutional means. After failing to take the Chávez administration seriously in its initial years, during which "Chavismo" became the only game in town and the Chávez government consolidated control of the country, the opposition pulled off a short-lived coup in 2002, orchestrated a devastating sixty-two-day bosses' strike that paralyzed the oil industry in 2002–03 and instigated an unsuccessful recall referendum to try to force Chávez from office halfway through his term in 2004. Chavistas see these efforts as little more than the machinations of a rich white elite that suddenly found itself powerless for the first time since the Spanish settled the territory in 1522.

And today, the success of Chávez's antipoverty missions is such that even his strongest opponent, Governor Manuel Rosales, promises not to do away with them if elected—a hard-to-imagine scenario, given Rosales's commitment to orthodox, pro-business economic policies and his insistence that these policies will insure that "capital returns" to Venezuela. But Rosales's campaign promise to keep the missions is itself a clear example of how far to the left the past eight years of Chavismo have shifted the Venezuelan political spectrum.

Rosales, who has the strongest track record and most experience of the prospective opposition candidates, was chosen behind closed doors as the challengers' consensus candidate. He is one of only two governors in Venezuela who are not from any of the many parties in the pro-Chávez ruling coalition. He supported the 2002 coup and was filmed embracing the coup president, Pedro Carmona, shortly before Carmona issued the decree that dissolved the Supreme Court and the National Assembly, changed the name of the country and empowered himself to fire any elected official. When asked why he backed Carmona, Rosales responded, "One makes mistakes in life, but what is definitely important is when one makes a decision like that, in the midst of confusion, that it be made in good faith."

The biggest innovation of the Rosales campaign, and the item likely to win him the most votes, is called *mi negra*, or "my black card," a charge card that Rosales promises, if elected, to give to all low-income Venezuelans as a way to directly distribute up to 20 percent of the country's oil profits, which amounts to billions of dollars per year. Depending on oil revenues, the card would provide a stipend of between $250 and $450 per month, per person—a good bit more than Venezuela's minimum wage. This populist proposal is ironic: The opposition regularly lambastes Chávez for being a "populist" and giving handouts, yet *mi negra* would require virtually nothing of recipients—except, of course, voting for Rosales. Further, the name for this initiative has racist implications in an election in which race is a constant subtext: Most opposition leaders are white, while Chávez, like most Venezuelans, is a mix of indigenous, African and European ancestry.

Racism is never far from the surface in Venezuela. While I was standing in line to buy a cold beer on a scorching hot Saturday morning in October during a Rosales campaign rally, a tall man wearing Diesel jeans and Armani sunglasses told me, "I can't wait to get that monkey out of office. I am sick of looking at his ugly face on TV for the last eight years."

Nor is the issue of US involvement very far from Venezuelans' minds. Reflecting a dangerous dependency among the opposition that trumps healthy critical engagement with the democratic process or a strengthening of civil society, one opposition supporter told me, "If we don't win in December, we can always hope the Marines invade." Opposition groups supporting the Rosales campaign have received financial support and incentives to work together through largely classified funding mechanisms involving the CIA, the US Agency for International Development and the National Endowment for Democracy. Documents obtained through the Freedom of Information Act reveal what seems to be the tip of an iceberg of US funding for opposition groups.

One of the best-known of these groups is called Súmate, or Join Up. María Corina Machado, the founder of Súmate, was in the presidential palace during the coup and while the Carmona decree was issued. Súmate and the US government openly admit that they have funding agreements, and since the coup, Machado has met personally with President Bush, Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice and many others in Washington's inner circles. The White House web page, in a caption under a photo of Bush shaking hands with Machado in the Oval Office, describes Súmate as "a non-governmental organization to defend the electoral and constitutional rights of all Venezuelan citizens and to monitor and report on the performance of Venezuela's electoral institutions."

Súmate used its US funding to initiate and then mobilize support for the recall referendum against Chávez in 2004—which Chávez won with nearly 60 percent of the vote. The Carter Center and the Organization of American States both certified the referendum as free and fair. But Súmate, along with most major opposition groups and parties, refuses to recognize the results, and Machado currently faces charges of using foreign

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money to influence Venezuela's domestic electoral process. The Venezuelan National Assembly has opened an investigation into the group's accounting irregularities related to large dollar transfers from US government agencies in and out of their accounts. Machado, who declined repeated interview requests, has said that she is being persecuted for politically motivated reasons.

Rosales consistently polls in the 30 percent range, while Chávez polls in the high 50s. However, no one is sure what to expect on election day. So polarized has the country become, and so suspicious is each side of the other, that conspiracy theories abound, with many Chavistas convinced that the opposition has some shady plan for preventing a clear and clean Chávez victory. Some believe that the opposition plans on delegitimizing an election they know they can't win, by boycotting it at the last minute, as five opposition parties, including Rosales's, did during the 2005 national assembly elections. Rosales vehemently denies that he is considering withdrawing, and given that many of his hard-core supporters believe he will win, it seems highly unlikely.

Other Chavistas present a variety of conspiracy theories involving a secessionist movement in the state of Zulia. Giancarlo Di Martino, a "Chavista light" and the mayor of Maracaibo, the capital of Zulia and Venezuela's second-largest city, has condemned a supposed destabilization plan involving CIA funding for violence and assassinations to interrupt the elections. Groups like Rumbo Propio, accused by pro-Chávez media of receiving covert US funding and tacit support from Rosales, openly advocate "autonomy" for the oil-rich state. Any violence, or even just a Rosales victory in Zulia, where he is already governor, could be used by the opposition to mobilize regionalist sentiments and to inspire Chávez government repression against the "Independent and Eastern Republic of Zulia," as US Ambassador William Brownfield is rumored to have called it in recent months. All this could open the possibility of direct US intervention—at least according to the theories of some hard-core Chavistas.

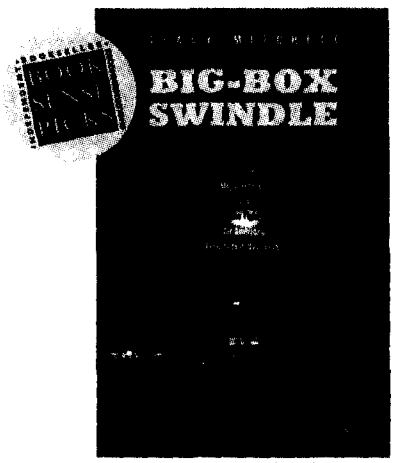
A more likely scenario is that Chávez will win the election with somewhere around 60 percent of the vote, nowhere near the 10 million he is campaigning for—an impossible goal unless voter turnout is nearly 100 percent and his share of the vote upwards of 66 percent. Some opposition groups, including those with US funding, like Súmate, will undoubtedly make accusations of electoral fraud, no matter what the international election observers say or how many of their demands regarding the terms of the election are met. And the Bush Administration is likely to continue its interventions—at this point political and electoral, although many Venezuelans are certain that the military option is on the table.

But Chavismo is now solidly entrenched in Venezuela, and Chávez has made many friends in Latin America and beyond (including Nicaragua's Sandinista leader Daniel Ortega, who recently won the presidential election there). Still, Chávez now faces the challenge of meeting the raised expectations of his own citizens, many of whom call for more radical reforms toward building what Chavistas call "twenty-first-century socialism." In the months and years ahead, Chávez will need not only the inspiration of Bolívar but also the engagement and participation of even greater numbers of Venezuelan citizens. ■

BIG-BOX SWINDLE

THE TRUE COST OF MEGA-RETAILERS AND THE FIGHT FOR AMERICA'S INDEPENDENT BUSINESSES

STACY MITCHELL



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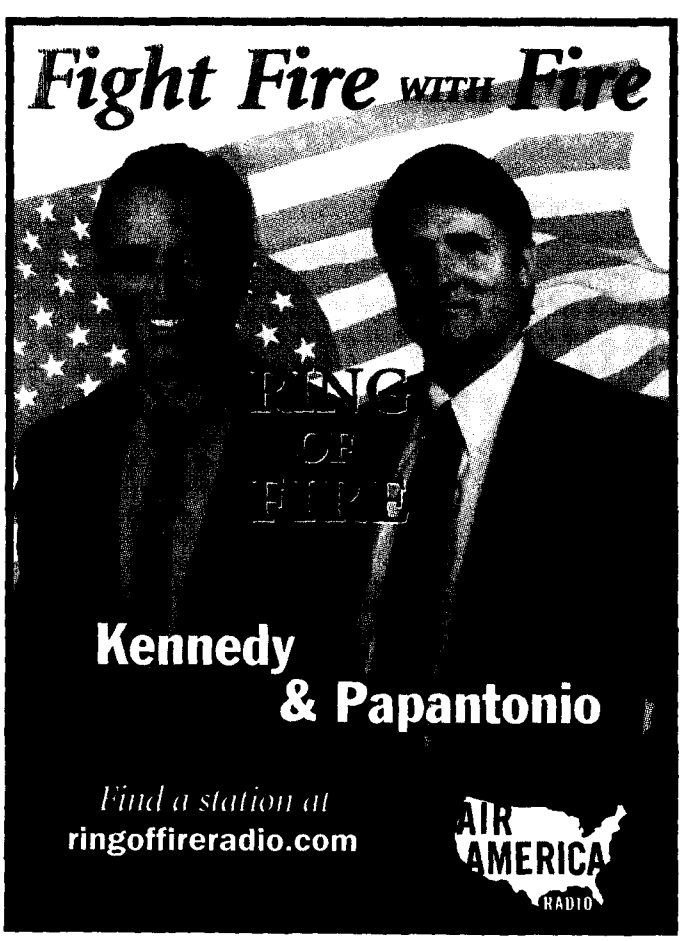

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COMMENT

(Continued From Page 8)

So when some three months after July's departure, four veteran *Libé* journalists publicly resigned under a union clause that allows journalists who disagree with a new editorial direction to demand a buyout, much of the remaining staff angrily and publicly refuted the implication that July's departure had compromised *Libé*'s editorial independence. The departing journalists' stance was seen by some as betrayal—a desire to abandon *Libération* and its uncertain future with a gilded parachute. As of yet, no one has made a strong argument that Rothschild has meddled in the editorial tone of the paper. In fact, he has been adamant that he wants *Libération* to maintain its traditional far-left editorial line.

Rothschild agreed in September to finance the paper until the end of the year, but his relationship with *Libé*'s staff grows more acrimonious by the day. In late October he rejected the strategic editorial plan prepared by the staff's representatives and countered with one that proposed further staff reductions and changes to the paper's bylaws—notably that the staff relinquish its veto power over major management decisions. An accord seems unlikely, and the paper's union has been casting around for alternative financing. Recently it made a desperate appeal to readers to join a "society of readers" whose membership dues will help sustain the paper. But the society is unlikely to counter *Libération*'s losses, which passed $6 million in June.

For now Rothschild and his aggressive cost-cutting seem to be the only alternative. No one else appears to want to invest in a money-hemorrhaging paper with an identity crisis. And *Libé*'s elite readership seems likely to continue its conflicted relationship with the paper. As one such French journalist told me: "*Libération* must not die, but a *Libération* owned by Rothschild is not *Libération*."

K.A. DILDAY

K.A. Dilday works in France and Morocco as a fellow of the Institute of Current World Affairs.

NATION NOTES

We welcome Lakshmi Chaudhry and Christopher Hayes as contributing writers to *The Nation* and to The Notion, our online blog. Both have appeared previously in *The Nation*. Chaudhry is a former senior editor at *In These Times*; Hayes is currently senior editor there. Based in San Francisco, Chaudhry has written for publications including *Wired News*, the *Village Voice* and *Mother Jones* and is the co-author of *Five Biggest Lies Bush Told Us About Iraq*. Hayes, who lives in Chicago, has written for publications including *The American Prospect*, *The New Republic*, *The Washington Monthly* and the *Chicago Reader*.

LETTERS
CONTINUED

(Continued From Page 2)

my brothers, my sister or me. America has always been diverse, and it will continue to be diverse. Hate, lies and fearmongering seem to be penetrating even those who preach against it. Do not fall for them. GUADALUPE RAMOS

St. Paul

■ Until the nativists realize that illegal immigrants are neither illegal nor poor by their own choice, and for as long as the nativists continue to blame immigrants for the economic trade policies that drove them northward in the first place, I believe "nativist" is the kindest name one can call them. The stupidest nativist ideas are the proposals that we can slow down the pace of immigration by creating bureaucratic barriers, or perhaps by building a wall. The former idea is like proposing that by making it harder to get a driver's license, we can reduce the number of motorists on the road. The latter idea is like proposing to improve job opportunity for whites by banning blacks. By all means, punish employers who pay illegal immigrants less than the minimum wage, but to threaten the victims of this exploitation with deportation or even criminalization is perverse.

Never before has capital been more mobile or investors better able to maximize their returns by running away, literally, from their social obligations. Never have workers everywhere been more outpaced by the mobility of capital. To try to correct this imbalance by restricting the mobility of workers is beyond stupid; it is insane.

The long-term solution to the problem that is the bottomless, heartless hemispheric market that drives migration is obviously to renegotiate NAFTA, CAFTA and all other violations of every nation's right to protect its own environment and its own workers. Achieving this will require not that we bash immigrants but that we co-operate with them, whether our government calls them "legal" or "illegal." I am well aware that to propose this idea may make me seem "out of touch" with white "middle America," but frankly, I have no wish to validate the nativists' deep desire to shoot themselves in their own foot. ERIC PAUL JACOBSEN

...AND SPEAKING OF IMMIGRANTS

Wilmette, Ill.

■ Re Patricia J. Williams's "Warlords of the First Amendment" ["Diary of a Mad Law Professor," Oct. 30]: When I grew up sixty years ago in a Brooklyn neighborhood that was home to first-generation Americans, it was Irish, Italian, German, Polish and Eastern European Jewish. English was the lingua franca among the parental generation, who spoke Gaelic, Italian, German, Polish and Yiddish. The butchers, delicatessen owners, tailors, bakers, barbers and other storekeepers spoke the same. By happenstance, one of my daughters lives in the same neighborhood now. It is Haitian, Yemenite, Pakistani, Afghan, Turkish, Korean, Japanese, Russian, Israeli. English is the lingua franca, and the parental generation and storekeepers speak their native tongues. My grandson graduated some years ago from the same public school I did in 1945, and the "bilingual" coordinator told me that she coordinated twenty-seven primary languages there! The neighborhood is completely different—and entirely the same! Three cheers for the Tower of Babel!

DAVID C. GARRON

HONEY, I SWITCHED MY VOTE!

East Orland, Me.

■ Thanks to John Shaw for listing the Dems who voted for the loathsome "enemy combatant" bill ["Letters," Oct. 30], but he got one wrong. Mike Michaud of Maine's 2nd District initially voted for the bill but changed his vote two days later during a second round of voting. Michaud admitted he didn't know what he was voting for, and when angry constituents told him, he switched. It is refreshing to see a politician admit a mistake and rectify it; and it's good to know that constituent pressure can get results.

LAWRENCE REICHARD

Representative Charlie Melancon of Louisiana's 3rd District also changed his vote. —The Editors

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BOOKS & THE ARTS

Representative Fictions

WILLIAM DERESIEWICZ

THE NOVEL, VOLUME 1: History, Geography, and Culture.
Edited by Franco Moretti.
Princeton. 916 pp. $99.50.

THE NOVEL, VOLUME 2: Forms and Themes.
Edited by Franco Moretti.
Princeton. 950 pp. $99.50.

This is a very ambitious collection, and it was put together by a very ambitious man. An attempt to encompass the whole history of the novel, from Heliodorus to DeLillo, Argentina to Japan, it includes more than a hundred essays, by nearly a hundred contributors, under a dozen and a half rubrics ("Toward World Literature," "Space and Story"), employing three different expository strategies: long synoptic essays, shorter readings of individual texts and brief explications of analytic terms or historical trends. And this is an abridgment of the five-volume Italian original. Imagine a comparable collection titled *Drama* or *Poetry*.

But Moretti is no stranger to grand, omnivorous projects. In *The Way of the World* (1987) he constructed a theoretical history of the *Bildungsroman*, or novel of development, the nineteenth century's major fictional genre. *Modern Epic* (1996) did the same for its titular form. (A projected third study, of modern tragedy, which would complete his exegesis of the major modern literary forms, has yet to appear.) Moretti is an unquestionably brilliant thinker, one of the major literary theorists of the past twenty years and an elegant, lucid writer to boot. His ideas are unfailingly far-reaching, unexpected and inventive. And he's right a good half the time. (Full disclosure: I studied with Moretti in graduate school, and while we butted heads fairly often in seminar, we remained on cordial terms.) The criticism of Moretti has always been that he thinks before he reads—that his grand syntheses encompass everything except the particular facts of the texts to which they lay claim. But Moretti is nothing if not nimble; in recent years, he has turned the charge into a battle cry, proclaiming a new method of "distant reading" to replace the traditional scholarly close reading that, he says, fetishizes a few hundred canonical novels at the expense of the tens of thousands that have been produced over the centuries. The kinds of critical procedures the new method entails may be gleaned from the titles of the works Moretti has so far produced in its name: *Atlas of the European Novel, 1800–1900* (1998) and *Graphs, Maps, Trees: Abstract Models for a Literary History* (2005). Rather than painstakingly interpreting the complexly integrated elements of a single text, distant reading conducts quantitative analyses of particular elements

[illegible] collection of [illegible] ambition, brilliance, and [illegible] Franco Moretti

across hundreds of texts at once—the geographical location in which they take place, for instance—treating *Middlemarch*, say, no differently from the dozens of potboilers and weepies published in the same era. Now Moretti can construct theories about every novel ever written, without even, as he has come to boast, having to read them at all.

The best thing that can be said about *The Novel* is that while it amply reflects the size of Moretti's ambition, constituting his latest attempt to place himself at the center of global novelistic study, it only sparingly reflects his critical aims. Quantitative analysis does rear its head in several places, and the collection is also highly uneven and in several respects rather poorly edited. But Moretti has enlisted some first-rate critics among his contributors, and they have responded with a large range and amount of superb work: Perry Anderson on Montesquieu's *Persian Letters*, Ian Duncan on Scott's *Waverley*, Valentine Cunningham

William Deresiewicz, who teaches English at Yale, writes regularly on books for The Nation. *He is working on a cultural history of modern friendship.*

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on Hardy's *Tess of the d'Urbervilles*, Philip Fisher on urban space in Joyce's *Ulysses*, Gerald Martin on Latin American fiction, Andreas Gailus on the German novella, Michael Denning on left-wing fiction as the first global literary movement, Nancy Armstrong on the evolving struggle across the history of the novel between individualism and bourgeois morality, Michal Peled Ginsburg and Lorri Nandrea on prose and poetry as competing value systems and the interplay of the two within novels themselves, Bruce Robbins on artist-figures as social climbers and the myth of bohemia, and John Brenkman on the false distinction between modernism and postmodernism and the true course of fiction in the twentieth century.

Across this great bulk and diversity of material, several persistent issues emerge. The first concerns the origins of the form itself. Moretti is to be commended for casting his net widely, implicitly challenging the novel's conventional boundaries in several directions. Standard accounts of the form's inception begin with *Don Quixote* at the start of the seventeenth century or, because Cervantes's work produced few immediate successors (for reasons skillfully explained by Joan Ramon Resina in "The Short, Happy Life of the Novel in Spain"), with Richardson and Fielding in the middle of the eighteenth. But as many of these essays show, the novel's roots go back much further, to the Greek novel of the Roman Empire (Heliodorus's *Aithiopika*, the last and greatest of them, was a major influence in the Renaissance) and to medieval romance (stories of King Arthur's knights and Charlemagne's paladins), the key relay point between ancient epics and the sixteenth-century chivalric romances with which Cervantes played his sublime games. But the novel also arose independently in other cultures, most notably sixteenth-to-eighteenth-century China, the subject of several essays here. What unites that period with both the Roman world and late Renaissance Europe, as well as with the developing world today, another hot zone in the novel's history, is modernization. The novel flourishes during periods of social and intellectual upheaval, when longstanding literary conventions and metaphysical beliefs can no longer carry the weight of lived experience.

Inseparable from the question of when the novel emerged is that of what it emerged from. A number of essays here sketch forms of prose narrative against or through which the novel would ultimately define itself, including the Japanese *monogatari*, of which the *Tale of Genji* is the most celebrated example, and the Arabic *maqama*, a kind of traveler's tale. For one of the novel's abiding characteristics is its magpie (or gadfly) relationship with other forms—as models to imitate, rivals to satirize, fodder to dismember and ingest (a relationship that continues especially with movies, though now also with comic books, to this day). Novels have cast themselves variously as epics made prosaic, romances made realistic, chronicles or confessions made fictional, rogue's tales made respectable and folk stories raised to the level of literature. The boundaries of the novel have always been porous, its nature heterogeneous, its form plastic, uniquely open to experiment and innovation—all characteristics that mark it, again, as modern. Indeed, only of the novel do we ask so insistently what it is and when it began, as if uncertainty about its origin and essence—or about origin and essence as such—were constitutive of the form.

Assailed on moral and aesthetic grounds, the novel has spent most of its life explaining why it shouldn't be despised, if not suppressed.

If the novel's relationship with other forms has generally been parasitic, its status within the culture as a whole has usually been disreputable. This is difficult for us to believe, living as we do in the wake of its hegemony during the first half of the twentieth century. But as many of these essays show, the novel has spent most of its life having to explain why it shouldn't be despised, if not suppressed. Horace ignored it, Hegel dismissed it, Japanese cultural authorities scorned it, Confucian philosophy relegated it to the bottom of the generic ladder, and literary critics and other cultural conservatives across Europe throughout the centuries of its rise saw it as a threat to religion, public order and the souls of their daughters and wives. Novels were accused of being frivolous and superficial, of inciting the imagination rather than the intellect and thus arousing strong emotions and illicit desires, especially among the weaker sex. (Women have formed the bulk of the novel-reading public in virtually every age, including our own.) Novels were also often accused, in their rough handling of received beliefs, of sedition and blasphemy. In the literary sphere—where the most prestigious forms were epic, tragedy or, in China, history—the novel was seen as illegitimate and debased: a vernacular, even colloquial, prose form that didn't seem to have much shape, couldn't be properly defined and had no apparent truth value. More recently, the novel has been assailed for being *too* true, too frank—hence the obscenity trials of *Madame Bovary*, *Lady Chatterley's Lover* and *Ulysses*.

No wonder so many of the greatest novels insist that they aren't really novels at all, or aren't *that* kind of novel—the run-of-the-mill improbable or sentimental or sensational kind. The novel has not only always struggled with other forms; it has also always struggled with itself. A contradiction seems to lie at the heart of the form. At least in its periods of growth (one would hardly say this about the American novel today, for example), the novel gives voice to the kinds of people and language and desires that more respectable forms suppress. But it also tends to recoil from the desires it arouses, the sheer readerly pleasure, devoid of anything like self-improvement, it so readily indulges. And yet this inherent tension, between low impulses and high art, may be the ultimate source of its powers, especially its power of self-renewal.

That power has been on vivid display over the past several generations throughout the developing world. The novel may have been superseded by visual media in the West, but to judge by a wide array of essays presented here, it has become a major mode of consciousness—specifically, of historical consciousness—in large parts of the world as they have been brought into contact with the West. Indeed, the characteristic theme of colonial and postcolonial fiction is precisely that experience of contact: the trauma of subjugation, the denigration of indigenous culture, the tragedy of the "superfluous man" made obsolescent by modernization, the felt inauthenticity of Westernized elites (the class to which the novelist almost invariably belongs). The stakes for the novel are higher here even than when the form was emerging in the West, because the novel as it has been received in the developing world is itself a Western form—the master's tools, as it were. Among other things, that circumstance makes the novel a bearer of values antithetical to traditional cultures, including individualism and the materialist or positivist conception of reality we call realism. No wonder the characteristic technique of postcolonial fiction is the adaptation of traditional forms—the *maqama*, the oral epic. No wonder, too, that the major models for non-Western novelists in recent decades have been Joyce and Faulkner, writers who stand at the sum-

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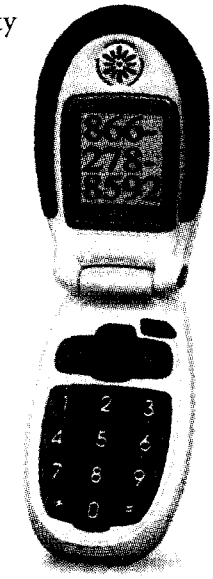

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mit of Western novelistic achievement yet simultaneously furnish paradigms for the attempt to forge the uncreated conscience of a defeated people.

The recent history of non-Western fiction recapitulates the Western experience in another, less happy respect: the novel's tendency to attract hostility, even persecution, from cultural authorities. One need only mention Salman Rushdie in this regard. The Rushdie affair points to an aspect of the novel that may seem to us its most obvious but that has historically aroused the greatest incomprehension (and, frequently, hostility), and that is—even now, even in the West—its most difficult to define: fictionality. The novel isn't true, like history, nor is it manifestly false, like legend or fable, so what is it? As Henry Zhao notes, "it seems that the very idea of fictionality baffled Chinese thinking," and the same was true in Europe, where, as Francisco Rico writes, fictionality constituted, upon its emergence, "a category of artistic perception hitherto unknown." When that emergence occurred is a matter of some dispute; one essay here puts it in sixteenth-century Spain, another in seventeenth-century France, a third in eighteenth-century England, a fourth in nineteenth-century Scotland (a sequence, not coincidentally, that is no bad itinerary of the novel's own emergence). This uncertainty should be no cause for embarrassment, however, but is rather an indication of the enormous difficulty with which a traditional culture, for which revealed religion was the exclusive standard of truth, wrapped its mind around so alien a concept. The establishment of fictionality as an epistemological possibility midway between truth and falsehood is an enormous cultural achievement, its possession an enormous cultural resource.

So what exactly is fictionality? As Catherine Gallagher explains in what is in a sense the collection's central essay, the idea of fictionality arose in contradistinction not, as we might expect, to the fantastic and improbable tales of, say, medieval romance but to what today we would call *romans à clef*, thinly veiled satires of real people. Fiction means that which is believable without soliciting belief, that which is referential without referring to real figures and events. Fiction is, in a word, representative: Because it doesn't tell us about anyone in particular, it can tell us about everyone in general, including ourselves. Fictionality enables identification, the chief of readerly pleasures, because it frees us from moral responsibility toward those about whom we read, but it also enables self-reflection, the chief of readerly virtues. Fictionality allows us to imagine (not fantasize)—an act that is not only not anti-intellectual but is in fact supra-intellectual, for it integrates intellect with feeling. The truths that the reading of fiction brings us are not factual and specific but general and philosophical—what earlier ages called wisdom. That may be why our own age of information has less and less use for both reading and fiction. Scientism (which seems to be more the property of laymen than scientists) believes that all truth is quantifiable and attainable through scientific method. Popular culture turns increasingly to "reality" programming and the memoir. Education has become simulation: the guy at Walden Pond who pretends to be Thoreau, the high school teaching segregation by dividing its students, for a day, by eye color. Lost in these exercises is the ability to imagine—to think and feel your way into other people's experiences without pretending to be them, to hold similarity and difference simultaneously in mind. The idea of fictionality, that cultural treasure, is in the process of being dismantled.

Fiction brings us truths that are not factual and specific but general and philosophical—what earlier ages called wisdom.

This is ultimately why I find Moretti's campaign for "distant reading," which has been gaining a lot of traction, so disturbing. The truth is, the new method isn't really as new as it would have us believe, and I'm not talking about the timeless phenomenon of intellectual megalomania, or what Gerald Martin points at when he refers here to "literary-critical *conquistadores* concerned to control vast territories without ever working the land." Distant reading, or quantitative analysis, is just the latest effort to put literary study on a scientific, or pseudo-scientific, footing, and it descends from an earlier attempt, structuralism. It was Vladimir Propp's work on the morphology of the folktale that got everyone counting motifs and "functions." Only now, we have computers to do the counting for us. One essay here extols the development of a "database of novelistic topoi," an effort that's been in progress for more than twenty years and has received contributions from scores of scholars—to what ultimate end is still not clear. Evidently, quantitative analysis seeks to emulate the sciences not just intellectually but also in terms of professional structure. Moretti may not read novels anymore, but his research assistants do, a group that apparently includes the Manhattan primary school class that helped prepare one of the charts accompanying his essay here (I'm not making this up). Now we can have labs, big grants and "basic research" done in the name of unforeseeable future benefits. Moretti also likes to borrow concepts from science, notably Darwinism and chaos theory—the idea being that literary forms develop not through influence but through something like (and I use the word "like" loosely) natural selection or turbulence. This theory has the advantage of reducing writers from people with brains to the equivalent of finches or fruit flies, unconscious actors in a vastly complex system. The person with the brain becomes the critic—an updating of structuralism's Oedipal murder of the Author in favor of the Reader. Rather than listening to works of the imagination, distant reading lectures them.

What's lost in all this is what I earlier called, with a humanism some would no doubt find touchingly quaint, self-reflection. Quantitative analysis reduces wisdom to information. I'm not suggesting that studying the great mass of mediocre fiction that people read in every age possesses no value. It clearly does, as a way of deducing all kinds of social and cultural trends, and it's the kind of thing that departments of history or sociology should be interested in doing. The problem comes when it displaces other forms of study within literature departments. Scholarship inevitably gives the lead to teaching. I don't just want the students of tomorrow reading Dan Brown and John Grisham and Jackie Collins for what those authors might show them about our culture. I also want them reading Toni Morrison and Philip Roth and Cormac McCarthy for what those authors will teach them about themselves, and if I had to choose one or the other, I would choose the latter every time. Critics who study mass culture forget that they're able to draw interesting sociocultural conclusions from such material because their minds have been trained on Shakespeare and Austen and Joyce. Train a mind on nothing but Brown and Grisham and Collins, authors who present no intellectual challenge, and it will develop no powers of its own, save the power to parrot the concepts it's been handed in the classroom. And what distinguishes fiction that's worth reading closely from fiction

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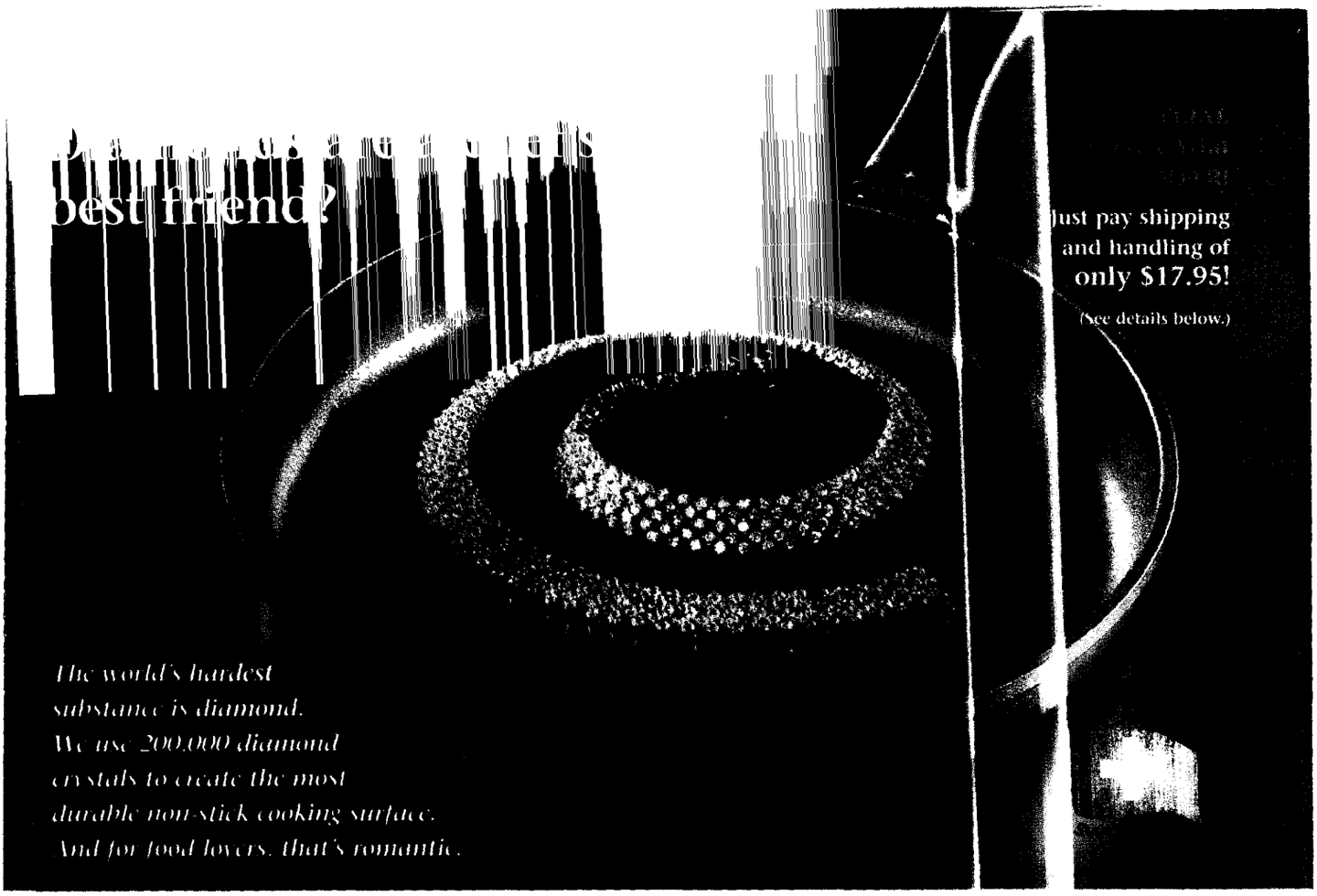

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that isn't is precisely what Gallagher might call representativeness. Literary power is the power to tell stories in a way that makes them persuasively representative, that makes you feel like the author is talking about you.

In any case, some of the first fruits of quantitative analysis are on display here, and the results are not pretty. One of the collection's two "Critical Apparatus" sections gives statistical profiles of the growth of the market for fiction in seven different countries. While some of these essays make useful points, and a couple of them interesting ones, they are distinguished, in general, by numbing banality and the use of methodologies that would make a statistician weep. (As one writer admits, "My data stop at precisely the point where one wants to know more.") Some of the charts aren't even properly proofread, though that problem is hardly unique to this section. The two volumes together contain well over a hundred typos and inconsistencies—which, given the collection's price and publisher and prestigious editorial board (which includes Fredric Jameson and Mario Vargas Llosa), is nothing short of disgraceful. Also disgraceful is the quality of the translations. Many of these essays are from Italian and other originals, and if the editors were going to bother having them translated, they might as well have taken the trouble to have them translated into English. Special mention should be made of Jeremy Parzen, who rendered a lot of the Italian. When you read phrases like "the *Götterdammerung*, which ultimately was caused by adultery and that marked the end of the Arthurian world," or "the relationship between interlacing and the whole with the reality of the episode and the knowledge of the totality," or "nearly any group of readers or listeners can participate thereof," you know you're in the presence of the Parzen touch. And speaking of Italian, about 20 percent of the essays in the collection are by Italian scholars, and while some of their work is quite fine, that proportion might—how shall I put this?—somewhat overrepresent Italy's worldwide share of literary-critical talent. Particularly distressing, to this reader, was the fact that fully three of the seven pieces on American literature, including the major synoptic essay, were written by one hand: Alessandro Portelli. Portelli's knowledge of American culture is decent but hardly distinguished, and his work here largely recycles insights from his own monograph. He's also enamored of the hoary old European image of the American primitive, doesn't know what "woolly-haired" means and thinks Margaret Atwood is American.

Still, for all its flaws, *The Novel* is an impressive achievement, and precisely because Moretti was so willing to include perspectives that diverge sharply from his own. Cunningham's passionately eloquent reading of *Tess* ends by asserting that Hardy's novel gives us, through its "forest of textual perplexities," "the knowable essence of a woman and her story." Fisher's essay on *Ulysses* is informed by a profound understanding of urban history and a profound feeling for urban experience. And Brenkman's smashing of the facile "first modernism, then postmodernism" model of twentieth-century literary history reminds us that grand critical narratives rarely survive contact with the immense complexity of human culture, and that the novel is a beast that no theoretical net—and no essay collection, no matter how big—will ever hold. ■

Half a Life

BENJAMIN HEDIN

THE LAY OF THE LAND. By Richard Ford. Knopf. 485 pp. $26.95.

For a time in the early 1980s, Richard Ford gave up writing fiction. His first two novels, *A Piece of My Heart* and *The Ultimate Good Luck*, had sold poorly and been remaindered. After starting a new project an editor told him to abandon the manuscript, a quietly lyrical account of a failed novelist writing for a national sports magazine, recently divorced, mourning the death of his firstborn and striving vainly, in the aftermath of these events, to recover a coherent sense of himself. That book was *The Sportswriter*, which won wide praise when it appeared in 1986, sold many thousands of copies and established its narrator, Frank Bascombe, as one of the more distinctive voices in contemporary American fiction. Since that success Ford has proved to be a fitful writer. His nine books, published during the past thirty years, are set in a variety of locales—there doesn't seem to be a state in the union he has missed—and concerned with a variety of predicaments, such as murder, theft and pettier crimes, adultery and adolescence. Each decade, though, he has faithfully returned to Bascombe, writing a pair of sequels to *The Sportswriter*: *Independence Day* (1995), the first book to be awarded both the Pulitzer Prize and the PEN/Faulkner Award, and, most recently, *The Lay of the Land*.

When the trilogy begins, Bascombe, who is nearing his thirty-ninth birthday, announces that he has "avoided ruin" in spite of being separated from his wife and losing his son Ralph to Reye's syndrome. If he has survived, he doesn't seem much the better for it. The only live faculties in Bascombe, it is clear, are the defensive ones, and in *The Sportswriter* he is prone to what he terms "seeing around," a method of deflecting grief by willing every emotion mutable. "If I was mad or ecstatic, I always realized I could just as easily feel or act another way if I wanted to," he says. This apathy makes Bascombe at times a volatile figure, vulnerable to sudden shifts of emotion; far more often, though, he is simply arrested, having no reason to act on feelings he does not view as genuine or lasting.

Independence Day presents a Bascombe who in some respects is different. He has become a wealthy realtor and is further removed from his divorce and Ralph's death; he no longer speaks in the subdued voice of *The Sportswriter* but bellows forth in long exhalations. ("Writing sports, as anyone can tell you who's ever done it or read it, is at best offering a harmless way to burn up a few unpromising brain cells while someone eats breakfast cereal, waits nervously in the doctor's office for CAT-scan results or mulls away dreamy, solitary minutes in the can.") Yet he still shuns risk and attachment, and will not commit himself in a significant way to anything or anyone. His attitude toward pain and turbulence is no longer to "see around" them but to remove himself from their path. "The worst thing about regret," he admits in *Independence Day*, "is that it makes you duck the chance of suffering new regret just as you get a glimmer that nothing's worth doing unless it has the potential to fuck up your whole life."

So for two decades Bascombe preserves

Benjamin Hedin, who teaches at The New School, is the editor of an anthology, Studio A: The Bob Dylan Reader *(Norton). He is currently finishing work on a novel.*

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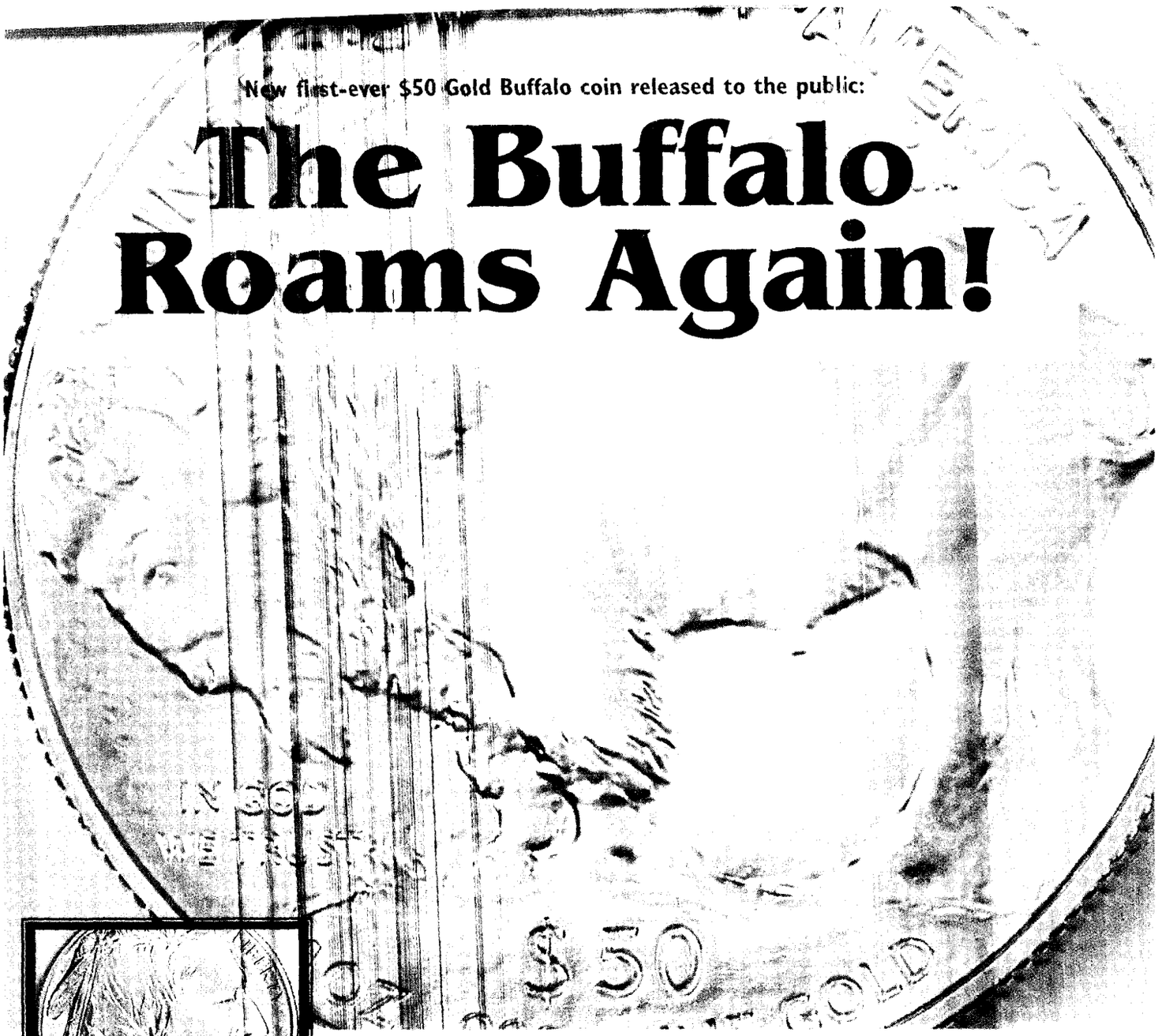

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a tidy, circumspect bachelorhood, keeping himself resolutely partitioned from the flux and gust of life. Children, his ex-wife, girlfriends, a Divorced Men's Club to which he once belonged: The question asked by every one of his botched dalliances and affiliations—whether or not he can authentically connect with another human being—is answered, over and over and over. No, he cannot. His story is one of permanent recoil, and this intransigence seems to bother even Ford, who said he hoped the close of *Independence Day* would signal a reversal of sorts. Ideally, that is, when Bascombe returned from a Fourth of July vacation during which his son Paul was violently injured, he would realize that he could no longer live according to so strenuous a code of guardedness and isolation. The book's title and doctrine, Ford explained in interviews, were ironic: True independence brings not self-sufficient exile, as the American tenet of individualism holds, but its opposite, and entails a willingness to love and be depended on by others.

This is quite moving, yet no reader of *Independence Day* would say that such a change occurs. Bascombe is too slippery; he wiggles free of Ford's hand. Only eight pages before the novel's end, in fact, he claims his best friend to be an old neighbor named Carter, with whom he shares an "unspoken rule never to exchange dinner invitations or to meet for drinks or lunch, since neither of us would have the least interest in what the other was up to and would both get bored and depressed and end up ruining our relationship."

Given such a confusion, such an unwitting rejection of his own purposes, Ford might see in his new book an occasion for correction, and locate the resolution to his trilogy by at last giving Bascombe his Independence Day. Much has happened in the interim; *The Lay of the Land*, which Ford has said will be the last Bascombe book, takes place twelve years after the close of its predecessor, during Thanksgiving of 2000, amid the protracted, contentious presidential election of that November. Bascombe has moved away from Haddam, New Jersey, to a town on the shore named Sea-Clift, and his second marriage, to Sally Caldwell, has ended: Five months before *The Lay of the Land* opens, she ran off with her ex-husband, Wally, long presumed dead but actually thriving as an estate gardener on an island off the western coast of Scotland. Soon afterward Bascombe was diagnosed with prostate cancer. Although his initial treatment was successful, he is less confident about a forthcoming checkup. His two children have grown up and left home, and relations with his first wife, Ann, are, as ever, strained and ambivalent.

Fundamentally, though, Bascombe is more or less as we left him in *Independence Day*—taking road trips, describing houses and foreclosing at once on whomever he meets, like this land developer, Tom Benivalle:

> My guess is Montclair State, marketing B.A., a tour with Uncle Sam, then home to work for the old man in the wholesale nursery bidnus in West Amwell. Married, then kids, then out on his own, tearing up turf and looking around for new business opportunities. He's probably forty, drives his Caddy to mass, drinks a little Amarone and a little schnapps, plays racquetball, pumps minor iron, puts out the odd chimney fire and voted for Bush but wouldn't actually hurt a centipede.

This passage, funny as it is, alerts us that Bascombe, and Ford, have no use for the novelist's traditional task of particularization. A laundry list of trivial or generic attributes is substituted for an exploration of a character's tics and individual habits.

Indeed, the riff is the novel's lone idiom, fit not only for a minor iron-pumper but for Bascombe's daughter, too: "Since college, she's started a master's at Columbia Teachers, intending to do work with severely disabled teens (her brother's mental age), volunteered in a teen-moms shelter in Brooklyn, trained for the marathon, taken some acting lessons, campaigned for local liberals in Gotham and generally lived the rich, well-appointed girl-life." This kind of writing has, alas, earned Ford much praise for his swift character sketches and social analysis. But it is really the glib-best prose, a breezy shorthand that wagers a character can be bullied into life—the complacent list-making of a man who sees everyone as a type, just one more excuse for easy irony. Bascombe might brag about his voting record, about being a rich Democrat and disdaining both Bush the younger and elder, yet in his isolation, in the way he restricts and narrows his worldview, he is the perfect conservative—especially by the definition of conservatives he cited in *Independence Day*: "people who won't quit making the same mistakes over and over."

These mistakes all cleave toward alienation, the only state Bascombe's acid wariness allows. His inability to make new mistakes saps the vitality from Ford's fiction, for every scene is an echo of an earlier one. John Updike has commented that the inevitable sameness of the Rabbit books was one of the reasons he killed him off so early, when the character was not yet 60. In *The Lay of the Land* Ford faces a similar struggle: the aesthetic laxity of a 1,000-page-plus endeavor whose subject is not war or anything else of a typically heroic scale but rather the mild, ultimately redundant vicissitudes and domestic entanglements of a New Jersey realtor.

Ford meets the difficulty in his normal fashion, by resorting to a moment of great violence. He is a consistently violent writer, appealing to violence to resolve or energize both the major and minor incidents in a story. The reason for this is less a love of spectacle or an interest in violence in a historical or metaphysical sense than Ford's belief that literary characters are defined by action as opposed to consciousness. As he told *The Paris Review* in 1996, "I've always been of the belief that physical action is of higher importance than meditation and cogitation." (In *Independence Day* Bascombe confesses to the same conviction.) "When I had Vicki smack Frank in the chops," Ford continued, "and knock him down in *The Sportswriter*, that's the purest example of what I find interesting in a book—not simply that she loves him or he loves her, but that it eventuates in her acting." This is a strange credo for a novelist to maintain, since the drama of privacy, "meditation and cogitation," is exactly what a form so intensely psychological favors. In any case, the spectrum of physical acts to be found in Ford's books is sadly narrow. They are always injurious (murder, gunfight, bar brawl), never sexual, never subtle. It is odd for a writer who insists on the unavoidability of physical action to portray only those acts that are a species of brutality. His fiction refuses to acknowledge that love and reflection and fury may result in not acting, or that immobility and repose can be dramatically rich and affecting.

Given the Bascombe books' length, the acclaim they have received and the expectations they raise, the stakes are high, and these novelistic failings are all the more noticeable. The violent coda to *The Lay of the Land* is a mostly arbitrary robbery and shooting, and what Ford hopes to accomplish with the scene is hard to discern. He could be obeying his rule that characters must always be engaged physically. Or, considering how often Bascombe alludes to crime that passes through the suburban barrier—a "wild world being just beyond our perimeter"—maybe Ford deemed it

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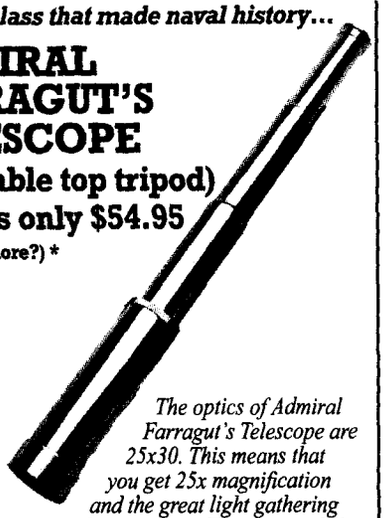

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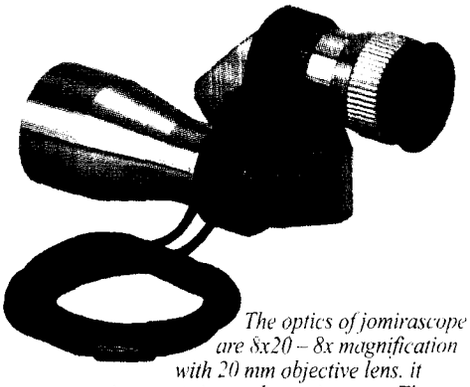

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logical that the wildness would reach Bascombe's own feet. But the randomness of the episode, its melodramatic hastiness, make it seem as if the bulk and repetitiveness of the Bascombe epic had finally exhausted Ford, and he had tried to graft some suspense and terror onto a story veering toward the boundless.

And so the book's valedictory finale rings artificial, since it is achieved by a device and not the evolution of its characters. Bascombe is shot in the chest, though he heals quickly from the wound and leaves for the Mayo Clinic to visit a prostate specialist. Sally accompanies him—providence, you see, is on their side, for she has chosen to return from Scotland the day after the shooting—though, strangely, we do not witness their reunion. Sally simply, improbably appears, and Bascombe declares that, after having to "learn some things about necessity—and quick" and deciding "to live, to live, to live it out," he has entered what he calls The Next Level. It is not clear if his cancer has remitted, or if he can ever truly reconcile with Sally, yet no reader of the trilogy can have any doubt as to the real outcome that awaits Bascombe: He will die, when he dies, alone. ■

FILMS

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STUART KLAWANS

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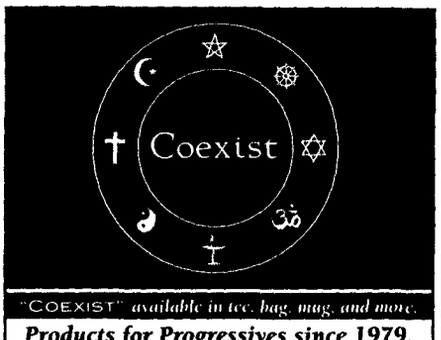
To start by oversimplifying—and why not, in an election year?—movie culture has forever been split between Charlie Chaplin and D.W. Griffith. From Griffith we get the aspiration to grand scale and elevated tone, massed armies and multiple story lines, with the director's visual power integrating personal narratives into historical simulation. The Chaplin tradition also has its artistic ambitions, despite being raffish and outwardly improvisational; but it focuses less on the creation of a cinematic world than on the realization of a star performance that never fully abandons the joy of a swift kick in the pants. For the moment, Clint Eastwood's *Flags of Our Fathers* is the most notable descendant of the Griffith line. The Chaplin line—as carried on by another English comedian sporting curly hair and a funny mustache—is currently represented by *Borat: Cultural Learnings of America for Make Benefit Glorious Nation of Kazakhstan.*

The public has now chosen between these traditions, as it does from time to time; and for this round it has decided the question by an epoch-defining majority. In one weekend, *Borat* grossed a reported $26.4 million: as much as *Flags of Our Fathers* took in during its first seventeen days in release. I am not such a fool as to think that immediate ticket sales determine a film's worth; nor would I judge a movie's social impact by its usefulness to op-ed commentators (who for the moment cannot live without *Borat*). That said, I can recognize a cultural turning point when it smacks me in the kisser. Griffith has been trounced. Chaplin rules.

And *Borat* is the movie of the year, the picture that makes all other films irrelevant. Do I like it? In my office as cinematic guinea pig of the American left, do I approve? Yes, but so what? I look upon *Borat* in awe, as I would gape at the sublimity of a tidal wave sweeping everything before it. Public solemnity? Obliterated. Displays of craftsmanship? Drowned. Respect for any authority, any institution, any individual (other than an impecunious Alabama call girl)? You've got to be joking.

Mere anarchy is loosed, and its name (bless him!) is Borat.

For those readers who have been studiously ignoring the world around them, I should explain that the title character, Borat Sagdiyev, is not so much a persona as an imposture, foisted on unsuspecting people by his creator, Sacha Baron Cohen. Supposedly, Borat is a broadcast journalist from Kazakhstan, which is here depicted in prologue as a life-affirming rural shantytown, vibrant with rape, incest, arms-dealing, neighborly ill will and festivals of Jew-hatred. (Is the depraved, mostly toothless populace meant to be Muslim, by any chance? "No," says Borat. "We fol-



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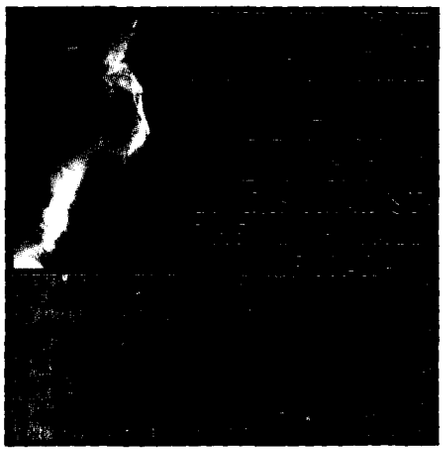

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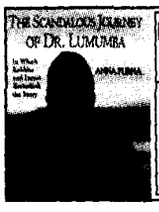

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low the Hawk.") This nation, though glorious, knows that it might yet have room to make benefit; and so Kazakhstan's Ministry of Culture, or something, has sent Borat to the United States to shoot an informative documentary about life in a different part of the world.

The gag—unstated, but unmissable—is that the film you are watching really is a documentary of sorts, shot by director Larry Charles, about an America that mirrors the imaginary Kazakhstan. Our nation, too, proves to be a place of race hatred, arms-dealing, seething hostility and unrestrained horniness, where the populace seeks to justify itself by appealing to a very Hawk-like religio-jingoism. The major difference between the two countries (other than the indoor plumbing) is that America is an actual site of these grotesqueries, as revealed through the unscripted interactions that Cohen, in the guise of Borat, enters into with real people, from subway riders in New York City to an alarmed team of security guards in Orange County, California.

Because Cohen has a daredevil's nerve (he never stops being Borat, no matter how much trouble he gets into), and because some of his adventures were shot covertly, *Borat* might be likened to a combination of *Jackass* and *Candid Camera*. But to say this is merely to acknowledge that Cohen remains true to his roots in television comedy (as Chaplin did to the music hall) and appreciates the disruptive potential of a live chicken, when it's released in the wrong place at exactly the right time. The more important point about the performance is that Cohen's Borat is a guileless man (almost)—naïve, certainly; stupid, without question; but enthusiastic, ingenuous and eager to please—so that the audience instinctively warms to him and even wants to protect him, the most obscenely offensive movie character of our time.

The effect is not just double- but quadruple-edged. Double, because Borat's apparent harmlessness highlights a corresponding goodwill, or even innocence, in many of the racist, chauvinist fools he meets and makes fun of. Maybe, if you are strenuously correct in your attitudes, you assume there must be something monstrous about drunken white frat boys who believe that "minorities" are keeping them down; or self-styled Southern gentry living a fantasy of antebellum elegance; or right-wing politicians working the crowd at a Pentecostal church. In their own eyes, though, these people are kind, decent, generous and patient—qualities that Borat in fact elicits from them, even as he slips in the knife.

The third and fourth edges come flash-

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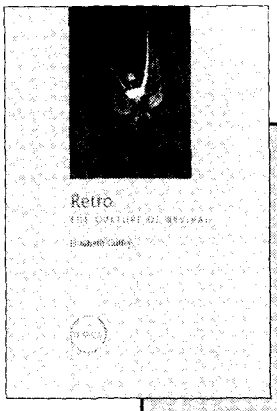

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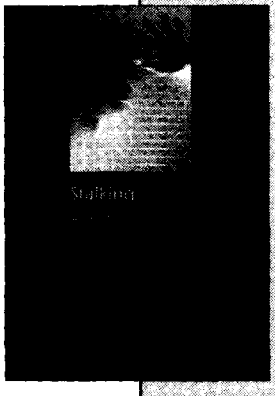

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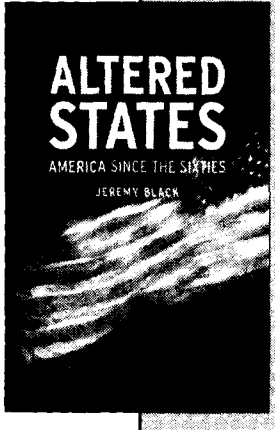

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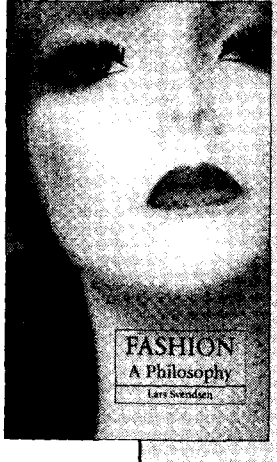

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ing from Cohen's aggression, which Borat's sweetness does not conceal. Consider the scene in which he visits an antiques shop in Dallas, where items of Confederate memorabilia are on display—"to celebrate our heritage," the proprietor explains. Borat, being a clumsy fellow, soon trips over his own feet and smashes some pieces, then falls backward while trying to right himself and smashes some more, then fails to steady himself with an awkwardly outstretched arm and so forth, until he's reduced an entire aisle to shards. On one level this is classic slapstick. On another it's punishment, meted out (with breathtaking peremptoriness) for the crime of complacency about slavery. You or I might dream of exacting such payback. Cohen actually gets it.

By being shameful and shameless in a single gesture, which is carried out with almost unprecedented exuberance, *Borat* sets loose raging torrents of laughter—reason enough for its popularity. But if you want to account for people's excitement about this movie—their sense that *Borat* is doing something in the world—you might look instead to the directness of Cohen's attack, and the deceptive simplicity of his method. These are Chaplin qualities. Everyone knows they're abundant in *Borat*; but they cannot be found in *Flags of Our Fathers*.

This is no fault of Eastwood's film. *Flags of Our Fathers* happens to be very good: intelligent, compelling, lovingly made and strikingly appropriate to our present moment in history. As you will have heard by now, the movie dramatizes the experiences of three of the men who were photographed raising the American flag over Iwo Jima. It follows their brief public careers as heroes (sent on a cross-country tour to sell war bonds) and contrasts them with the agony of the battle they had just survived. So this is a war picture about the power of pictures in wartime: about the conversion of bloody chaos into meaning, and the transformation of fallible, suffering men into figures of virtue. For Eastwood, who has long brooded over the folklore and the reality of violence, this theme feels entirely natural. (So, too, does his empathy with one of the protagonists, a Pima Indian named Ira Hayes. Having mourned over racism in many previous films, Eastwood makes it a central topic of this picture.) If the screenplay is short on dramatic tension—with writers William Broyles Jr. and Paul Haggis following dutifully in the footsteps of established fact—there is more than enough physical conflict to keep the picture moving. Maybe the narrative doesn't crackle quite enough; but how would prospective audiences know?

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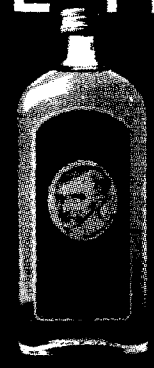

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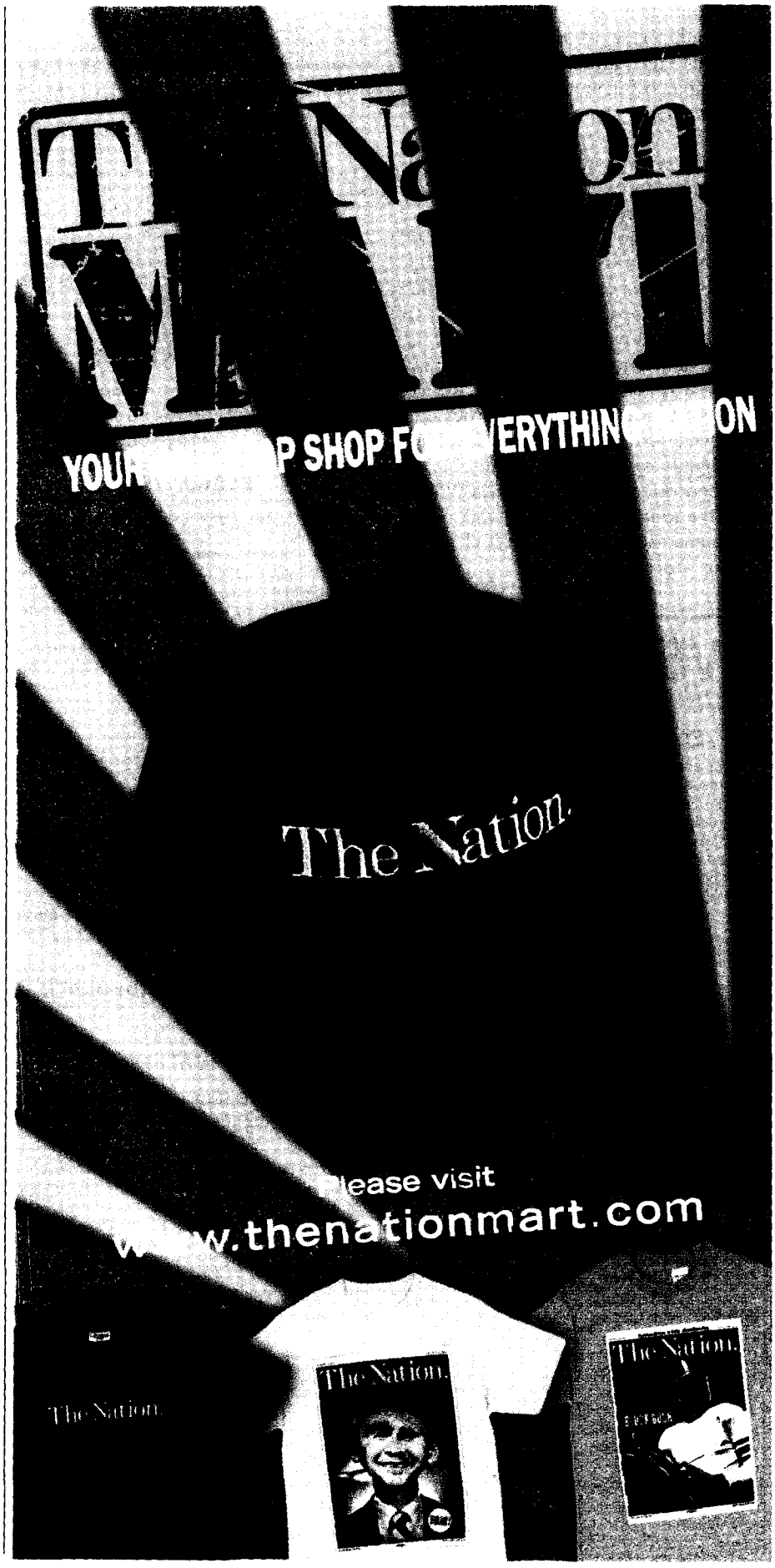
People do understand, though, just by looking at the newspaper ads, that *Flags of Our Fathers* will be weighty, impressive, instructive, magisterial. These are the strengths of Griffith's tradition—and they are fatally ill-timed, now that Cohen's hit-and-run vehicle is careening into theaters. Moviegoers have clearly elected to go with the swift, the mobile, the riotously vulgar; and it doesn't surprise me that they made this choice just days before the general population voted (far less decisively) for change.

Borat is a triumph for truly pissed-off Americans: younger ones especially, who feel the time has passed for polite exposition and patient analysis. They just want to laugh their heads off, as the whole existing order is mowed down. How many such citizens are there? I have no idea. But I know that cultural change doesn't require a majority, only an invigorated critical mass; and that's what *Borat* is creating.

Not since Dylan went electric...

Short Takes: Like Christopher Guest's other mock documentaries (*Waiting for Guffman*, *Best in Show*, *A Mighty Wind*), *For Your Consideration* is an ensemble piece about the hopes, cruelties and absurdities of a particular form of show business. The milieu this time is independent film production; and leadership of the Guest stock company has shifted to the utterly brilliant Catherine O'Hara. She takes the role of a midcareer actress—hard-working, uncelebrated, justifiably worried that her jobs are disappearing as the wrinkles settle in—who becomes the subject of an anonymous Internet rumor. Someone writes that she is "Oscar-worthy" in her new picture; and though the movie is a cheap and crumbly piece of halvah titled *Home for Purim*, she is needy enough to believe she might be nominated for an award. Harry Shearer and Parker Posey co-star as her fellow actors, who also get caught up in Oscar madness. Eugene Levy, who wrote the script with Guest, appears as the world's most useless agent. Jennifer Coolidge plays a producer with a yawning abyss for a brain. The goings-on in *For Your Consideration* are as uproariously funny as in any of Guest's films to date; and thanks to O'Hara's genius, they're a little heartbreaking, too.

Nikolaus Geyrhalter's *Our Daily Bread* is a science-fiction film of sorts—the *2001: A Space Odyssey* of modern food production. It is wordless, stately, disquieting, disorienting. Also, it's a documentary. Shot in direct-cinema style, the film takes you into a series of European industrial plants, where gleaming steel tubes spray out baby



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chicks, robotic hoses cruise through aisles of vegetation, giant wheels rotate with cows strapped to their arms. Every so often you see a human being tending the equipment in mechanistic silence. A worthy selection of the 2006 New York Film Festival, *Our Daily Bread* is now beginning a well-deserved theatrical run, starting in New York at Anthology Film Archives.

About *Fur*, an "imaginary portrait" of Diane Arbus, all you need to know is that it is "not a historical biographical movie" (in its own words) but rather seeks to "reach beyond reality." It reaches so far that Nicole Kidman might as well be playing Alice in Wonderland, with Robert Downey Jr. co-starring as Jean Cocteau's Beast, while Arbus figures only as a famous name signifying high-art solemnity. Steven Shainberg directed; Erin Cressida Wilson wrote the script. Mark their names. They have made the biggest, whitest elephant in many years. ■

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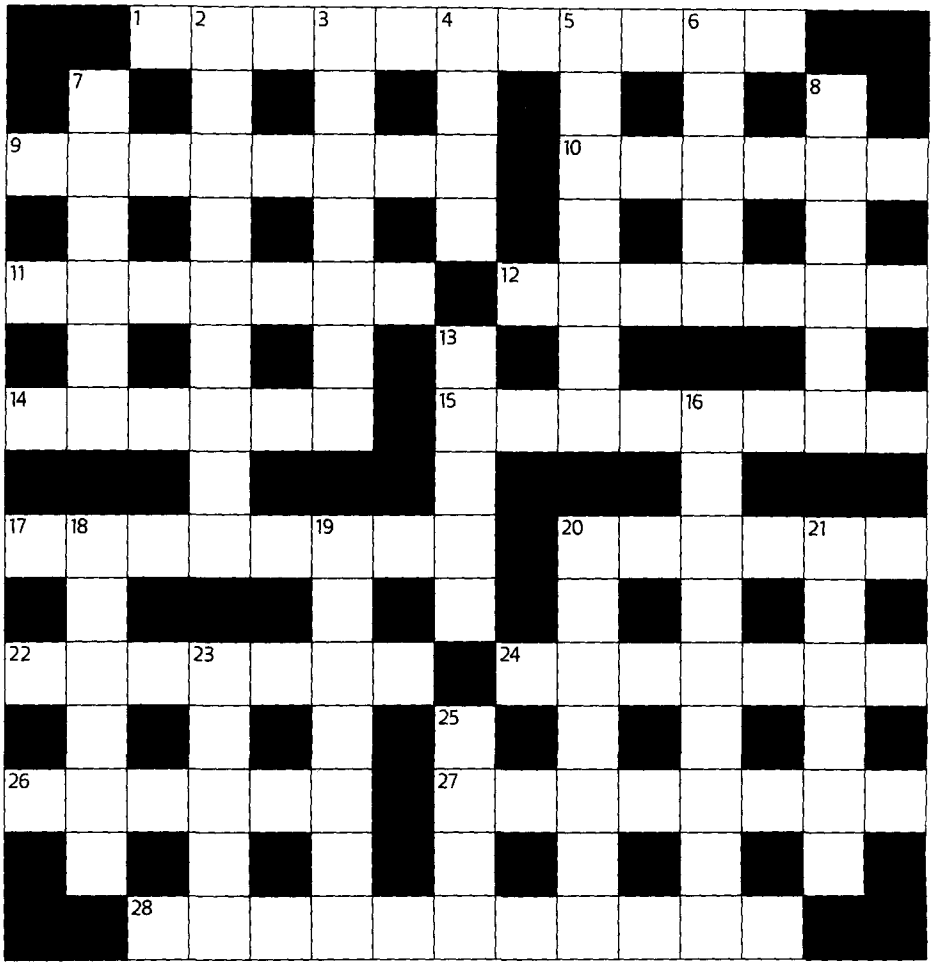

ACROSS

1 This man is no different from a museum type. (11)

9 and **18** down Suggesting that hoisting devices develop a coughing noise? That's for the birds! (8,6)

10 Predator is deeply engrossed, otherwise—"Caesar" by the sound of it. (6)

11 The "police force," as they say, comes back and cuts things down—and throws a few winning punches, as well. (7)

12 In which the government charges so much a head? (4,3)

14 What may be necessary for the making of a nog in place of liquor serving? One is said to be incapable of choosing. (6)

15 A failure to hit the top of the mountain—or not to tell the truth about it? (8)

17 Little science with an article on an unspecified object—describing a nasty remark. (8)

20 The place where people swim in the ship? They have the potential for a lot of wind. (6)

22 The traitor comes back to rise, which is out of order—and still hangs around. (7)

24 A couple of banks here need a lot of pull, where Eve reputedly came from in reverse to seem in error. (7)

26 The account of a gun's explosive sound, or a corded fabric scrap? (6)

27 An early Dalmatian, but a bad actor in a bit of trouble. (8)

28 The purpose for being in Paris changes "rain" to "reeds." (6,1'4)

DOWN

2 and **8** Music said to have a lunatic effect on a boy, at a closing. (9,6)

3 One who takes a tumble as a traveler. (7)

4 Possibly an advertisement that makes you sing badly. (4)

5 Hurried up on successive lines, and limits the possibilities of an answer. (7)

6 Ma's companion comes up with a friend, which is enough to fill one with dismay. (5)

7 Article about a car being tipped over in the old country. (6)

8 See 2

13 One gets the game thrown, if you get the picture. (5)

16 One who doth do it too much, methinks? (9)

18 See 9 across

19 Thinks about the notion that gets set up? (7)

20 So it climbs up in the backbone, having a lot of stickers! (7)

21 In the manner of a Confederate leader, with room to spare. (6)

23 Hoard accumulated by a TV gal. (5)

25 To a point, able to go over the verse. (4)

PUZZLED? No more cross words. If you don't see why "Lures" are "Ground Rules" send for those of Mr. Lewis to: Puzzled, The Nation, 33 Irving Place, New York, NY 10003, or access our website at www.thenation.com/about/crossword.mhtml.

SOLUTION TO PUZZLE NO. 3058

Q	U	A	R	T	E	R		M	A	S	T	E	R	S
U		D		U		O		E		E		N		A
A	N	D	O	R	R	A		A	R	R	I	V	E	D
R		I		N		R	E	D		I		E		I
R	U	S	T	I	C		U		T	E	L	L	E	R
E		O		P	A	U	P	E	R	S		O		O
L	A	N	A		T		H		E		O	P	E	N
			N	E	W	Y	O	R	K	E	R			
P	A	R	D		A		R		K		E	Y	E	S
H		E		C	L	A	B	B	E	R		A		C
R	E	M	A	R	K		I		D	E	A	R	T	H
A		O		I		S	A	C		T		D		I
S	E	V	E	N	T	H		A	N	I	M	A	L	S
E		E		G		U		S		N		R		M
D	E	S	S	E	R	T		E	R	A	S	M	U	S

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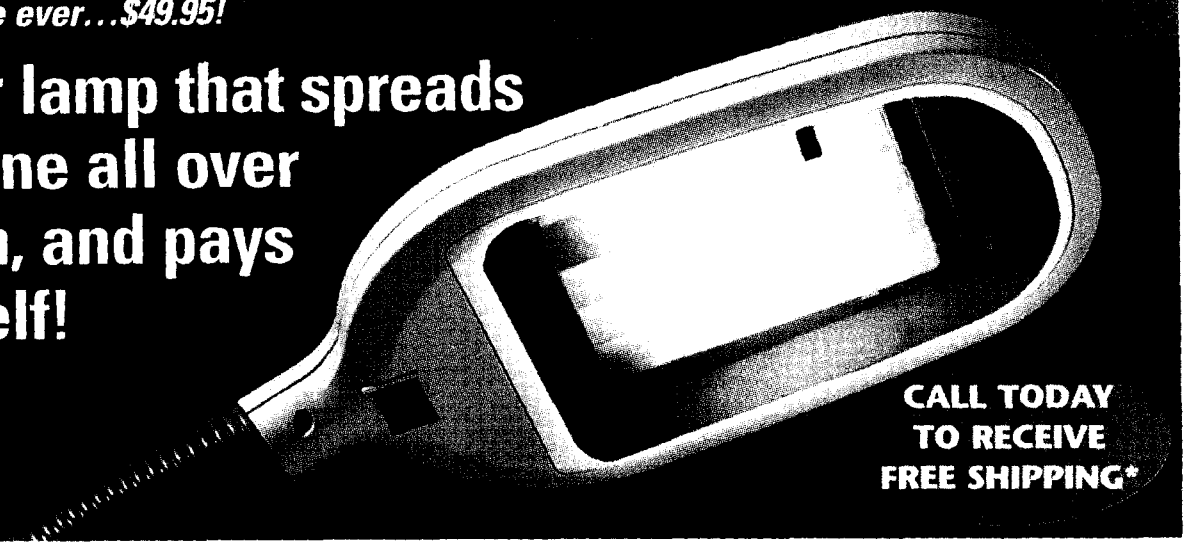

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*Source: "Lighting the Way to Energy Savings" 1999

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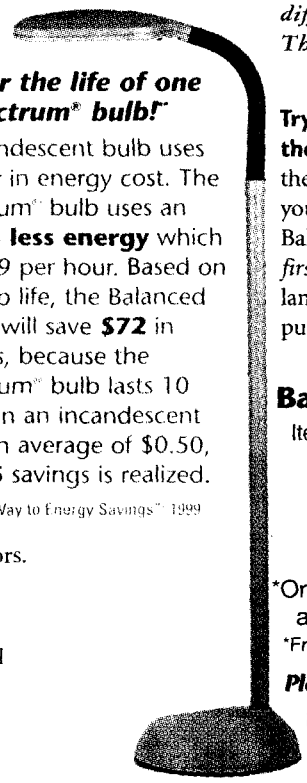

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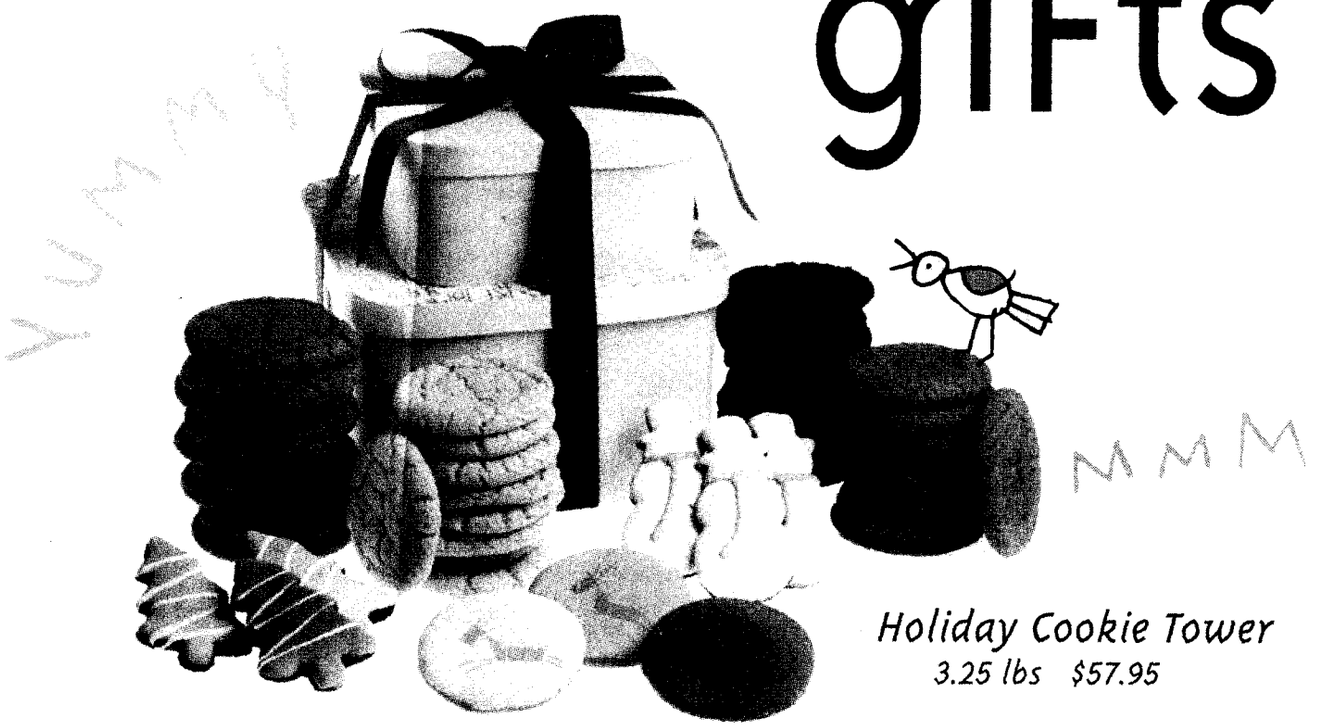

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